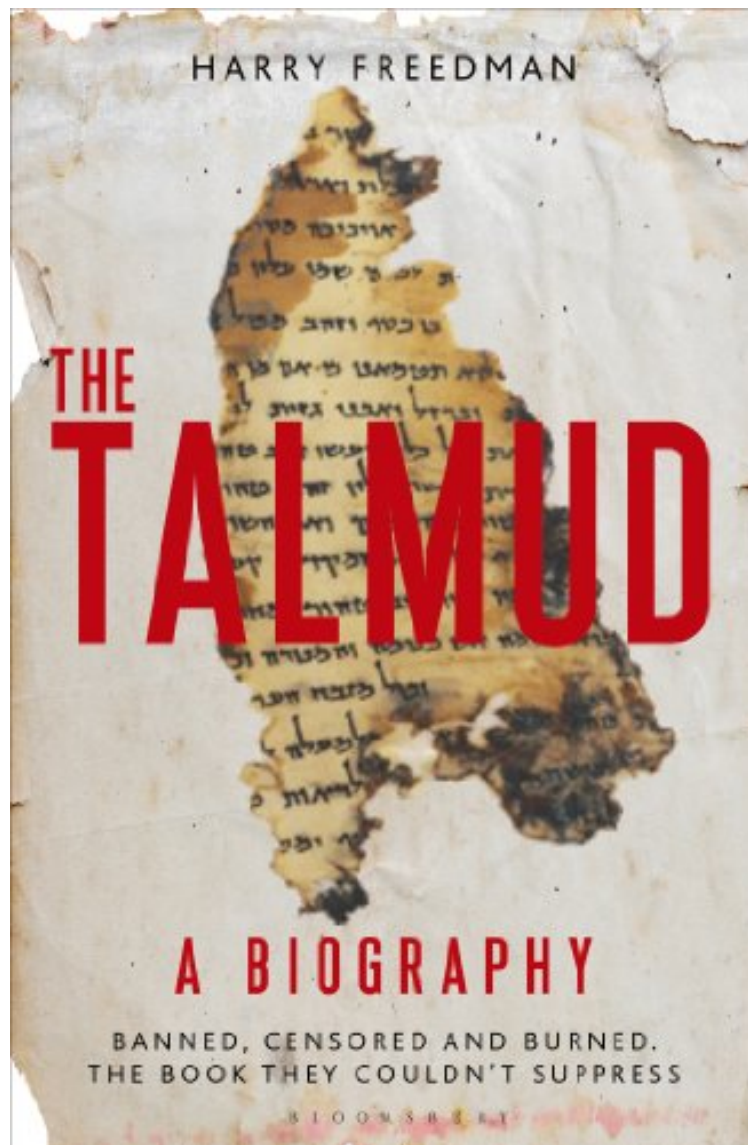


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The Talmud A Biography: Banned, censored and burned. The book they couldn't suppress

Harry Freedman

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Harry Freedman : The Talmud A Biography: Banned, censored and burned. The book they couldn't suppress before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Talmud A Biography: Banned, censored and burned. The book they couldn't suppress:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. interesting history of the Talmud, but with too many digressions
By jsa
This "biography" of the Talmud is an interesting overview of complex history that has many things going for it, but also suffers from a number of minuses. On the positive side, Dr. Freedman does an excellent job of tracing the evolution of the Babylonian Talmud from its origins as an accumulation of discussions among the rabbinic sages over several centuries, which were transmitted orally from one generation of scholars to the next, until its compilation, redaction and commitment to written form. Among the negatives, the author can't seem to decide whether his subject is a history of Judaism or of a series of books that were central to its development. While this is understandable, given the historical (and continuing) importance of the Talmud, the author still devotes too much space to extraneous material, much of which is quite subjective. To cite just one example, the saga of the false messiah Shabbtai Tzvi is recounted in detail, yet it has no relevance whatsoever to the story of the Talmud. On the other hand, there is some material on the Vilna Gaon, a towering figure who was the Lithuanian equivalent of one of the ancient Jewish sages; but the author, who is so wrapped up in recounting irrelevant anecdotes, doesn't communicate the full significance of the role of the Gaon and the world he lived in. In fact, the Vilna Gaon was the ultimate product of a culture where the study of the Talmud reigned supreme, where thousands upon thousands of young men attended hundreds of Yeshivas in Poland and Lithuania taught by some of the greatest minds of 18th and 19th century Judaism. This dimension of the story of the Talmud - its dominant role in the lives of Eastern European Jewry - is underemphasized. Separately, "The Talmud: A Biography" would have benefitted from a more attentive editor. There are, for example, numerous instances where sentences have an odd structure because they are either missing a conjunction or are simply two sentences written as one. One example will suffice: "His teacher Yehudai had tried something similar and had been rebuffed, the heirs to the Jerusalem Talmud were not going to be dictated to by those of the Babylonian version." (p. 70) In some cases, multiple sentences should have been formed into one unit: "There was a far more urgent battle looming. Against a Jewish sectarian group known as the Karaites. Who, like the Sadducees some centuries earlier, did not accept the Oral Law at all." (p. 71) Despite the intermittent lack of focus, I found "The Talmud" to be interesting and informative, and would recommend it as an introduction to the Talmud's formation and evolution. For a summary of the Talmud's content, I would recommend Solomon Schechter's "Aspects of Rabbinic Theology" and Abraham Cohen's "Everyman's Talmud."
19 of 21 people found the following review helpful. It's a good overview of how the Talmud come to be and ...
By Stuart
This book contains no original material and is not written for the serious scholar but it combines a lot of material in one volume and to my knowledge, this has not been done before. It's a good overview of how the Talmud come to be and how it influenced the world from it's inception to the present day. There are many books about the Talmud but none that give you this wide an historical overview. It's very readable for the layman and I recommend it for anyone who wants to know what the Talmud is all about.
1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Five Stars
By James V. Zeitz
great history of Rabbinic interpretation, as well as the whole history of the Mideast in the Middle Ages!

Containing nearly two million words in thirty-seven volumes, the Talmud covers topics as diverse as law, faith, medicine, magic, ethics, sex, humor, and prayer. It is a highly complex, profoundly logical, and frequently impenetrable work with a history like no other. In its fifteen-hundred-year history, the Talmud has been banned, censored, and burned; dissected by scholars and rabbis; probed by philosophers, poets, politicians, and kings. In *The Talmud*, Jewish scholar Harry Freedman tells the engrossing story of an ancient classic, the legal and mystical pillar of Judaism, and recounts the story of a chronicle that, in many ways, parallels the history of the Jewish people. From its origins as a record of discussions among scholars in towns and villages close to modern-day Baghdad, Freedman traces the spiraling paths of the Jewish diaspora and explores the story of the Talmud, its role during the Enlightenment, and its influence over traditional Judaism. A compelling fusion of law, storytelling, and spirituality, the Talmud's story provides fascinating insight into the history of Judaism, and Harry Freedman's *The Talmud A Biography* is a remarkable account of one of the most important cultural, historical, and religious works of our time.

Freedman brings impressive research to the biography of a 2,000-year-old text that still excites scholars, inspires controversy and reflects turbulent events in Jewish history. Kirkus
A biography of the Talmud--call it a bibliobiography--is welcome. Such a book could explain how the Talmud came to be and who reads it and why. Perhaps most important, it would explain to the uninitiated how to understand the Talmud's complicated logic. Harry Freedman's *The Talmud: A Biography* addresses almost all of these subjects . . . Mr. Freedman writes with evocative brio. *Wall Street Journal*
While the Talmud itself may be impenetrable for many, in *The Talmud A Biography: Banned, censored and burned*. The book they couldn't suppress, author Harry Freedman has written an engaging account of the book itself. For those who may be fascinated by the Talmud and at the same time intimidated by it, the book is a great resource that profiles what the Talmud is. Ben Rothke, *The Times of Israel*
About the Author
Dr. Harry Freedman is a writer and academic with a Ph.D. in Aramaic. His books include *The Gospels' Veiled Agenda*. He contributed to the *Encyclopedia of Modern Jewish Culture* and has written for the *Jewish Chronicle*, *Jewish Quarterly*, *Judaism Today*,

and the Huffington Post. He lives in London.