

The Talmud, a Biography: Banned, Censored and Burned—The Book They Couldn't Suppress

Harry Freedman. Bloomsbury, \$26.99 (256p) ISBN 978-1-4729-0594-9

“This history by Freedman (*The Gospels' Veiled Agenda: Revolution, Priesthood and the Holy Grail*) is reminiscent of the school of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* (the scientific study of Judaism), in which **an honest accounting of history enriches, rather than endangers, understanding of Judaism**. Freedman veers slightly from this approach, however, in describing the Talmud as an expansion of the written Bible. The Talmud consists of excerpts of the legal work known as the Mishnah, plus the Gemara, wide-ranging rabbinical discussion on those laws. Though this discussion ties laws to text, the actual origins of most of these laws are lost in history. This premise—that the Talmud is a Bible commentary—nevertheless does not diminish the book as a history of the Talmud, its oral origins and its written composition, the relationship of Jewish communities to that work, and the influence of other cultures (e.g., Islamic intellectual cultures). **Overall, this is not only a masterful and engaging introduction to the history of the Talmud, but a useful lens through which to view Jewish history.** Agent: Sheila Ableman, Sheila Ableman Literary Agency. (Oct.) “