

The Origin and Evolution of “Mesoret ha-Shas”¹

By: ELI GENAUER

The *Mesoret ha-Shas* is an indispensable tool for studying Talmud. When readers look at the text of the Talmud and see an asterisk, their eyes immediately move to the inner margins to see what the *Mesoret ha-Shas* has to say.² The cross-referencing of sources, a basic tool to assist in learning, was not always available to those “swimming in the sea of the Talmud.” The first examples of such aids were in a rudimentary state and using them was quite challenging. The *Mesoret ha-Shas* most often refers the reader to other places in Talmudic literature where the same subject is discussed. These references serve to broaden the reader’s knowledge base and oftentimes help him to better understand the *sugya*. At times the *Mesoret ha-Shas* corrects the text, and there is even one instance where it provides a diagram to illustrate the words of the Talmud (*Shabbat* 60b). We will use Talmud *Shabbat* 60b and *Erwin* 2a to show some changes that evolved in this important resource. We will also investigate who “wrote” the *Mesoret ha-Shas* and the genesis of how it was received.

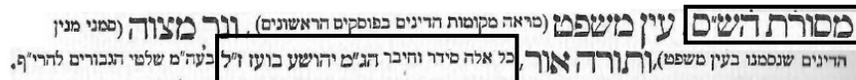
¹ I would like to thank Marvin Heller for his comments on this article and for his ongoing support of my research.

² *Mesoret ha-Shas* is one of three citation tools found in the standard editions of the Talmud. The other two, *Ein Mishpat* and *Torah Or*, compiled by R. Yehoshua Boaz are not within the purview of this article. Regarding the relationship between *Ein Mishpat* and another citation device, *Ner Mitzvah*, see Marvin J. Heller, *Printing the Talmud* (New York: Im Hasefer, 1992), 188-89. R. Shlomo ben Eliezer’s *Avodat ha-Levi*, first published in Constantinople in 1515, is likely the basis of *Ein Mishpat*. The bibliographer Ben Jacob is incorrect when he states that R. Shlomo intended to publish a larger work on the topic, titled *Ein Mishpat*. See Isaac Ben Jacob, *Otzar ha-Sefarim* (Vilna: Romm Press, 1880), 428, entry 26. R. Shlomo ben Eliezer does not mention any such work in his author’s addendum to *Avodat ha-Levi*. Instead, *Ein Mishpat* was a later work based upon *Avodat ha-Levi* but not written by the same person.

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Was R. Boaz the Author of *Mesoret ha-Shas*?

The Vilna Shas (*Masekhet Berakhot*, Vilna, 1880) notes on its title page that *Mesoret ha-Shas* was organized and composed by R. Yehoshua Boaz, the author of the *Shiltei Ha-Giborim* commentary on the *Rif*.



A contemporary expert in the history of the printing of the Talmud, Marvin Heller, writes that Yehoshua Boaz ben Simon Barukh was “responsible for the innovations introduced into this edition (that of Giustiniani [1546-51]) that have been reprinted in all subsequent Talmud editions.” This included three indices placed on each *amud*; “the third reference, *Mesoret ha-Talmud* (now called *Mesoret ha-Shas*) references comparable passages elsewhere in the Talmud and is located along the inner border of the page.”³ Thus, according to Heller, R. Boaz authored the *Mesoret ha-Shas* which was originally titled *Mesoret ha-Talmud*.

Likewise, a nineteenth-century expert on the history of the printing of the Talmud, Rav Raphael Nathan Nata Rabbinovicz, seems to indicate in his *Maamar ‘al hadpasat ha-Talmud* that R. Boaz is the author of *Mesoret ha-Talmud*.⁴ There he lists all the improvements in the Giustiniani edition of the Talmud:

³ See Marvin J. Heller, *Printing the Talmud: A History of the Earliest Printed Editions of the Talmud* (Brooklyn, NY, 1992), pp. 188, 190. It is possible that Heller means the innovation was placing this reference tool on the side of the page, not that he was the original author, but it is not clear.

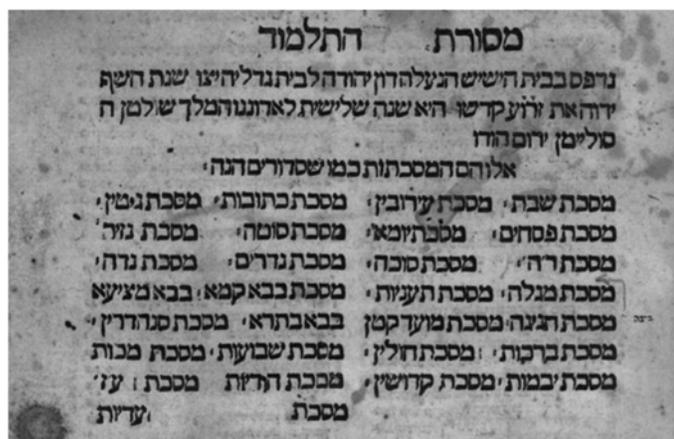
In a conversation with Marvin Heller, he encouraged me to write an article which highlighted the origins of *Mesoret ha-Shas*, as he feels that many are unaware of the fact, as discussed below, that the identification of parallel statements in the Talmud predated the inclusion of *Mesoret ha-Shas* in the Giustiniani edition of the Talmud.

⁴ Raphael Nathan Nata Rabbinovicz, *Maamar ‘al hadpasat ha-Talmud with Additions*, ed. A.M. Habermann (Jerusalem: Mossad ha-Rav Kook, 2006), 48. The *Maamar*, as it is colloquially known, was first printed in 1868 by the author in his *Dikdukei Sofrim* at the end of *Masekhet Berakhot*, and was revised by the author and printed in *Dikdukei Sofrim* at the end of *Masekhet Megillah* in 1877. It was reissued as a work on its own in 1953 by Mossad ha-Rav Kook with additions by A.M. Habermann and again by Mossad ha-Rav Kook in 2006. Rabbinovicz later indicates that R. Boaz did not author *Mesoret ha-Talmud* but does not explain the earlier statement. See *Maamar*, 50.

ובמהדורה זו של התלמוד ניתוסף על דפוס בומבירגי מראה מקום לפסוקים המובאים בגמרא עם מקומם בתנ"ך, ומסורת התלמוד, ומראה מקום בתוספות כל מקום שמביאין התוספות גמרא ממקום אחר, ועין משפט והוא מראה מקום בפוסקים, ונר מצוה והוא מניין הדינים המובאים בעין משפט, חיברם כולם הגאון מו"ה יהושע בעז מברוך, בעל המחבר ספר שלטי הגבורים על הרי"ף.

And in this edition of the Talmud are added—in addition to those of the Bomberg Edition—citations for Biblical verses that appear in the Talmudic text along with their sources in Tanakh; and *Mesoret ha-Talmud*, and sources for Tosafot wherever Tosafot quotes a Talmudic passage from another area; and *Ein Mishpat*, which is the collection of citations to *Poskim*; and *Ner Mitzvah* which is an accounting of laws that appear in *Ein Mishpat*. **All these were written by ha-Gaon Yehoshua Boaz Mi-Barukh**, the author of *Shiltei Ha-Giborim* on the *Rif*.”

The words "חיברם כולם" seem to indicate that Rav Yehoshua Boaz (Mi-Barukh) was the original author. But was R. Boaz the author of *Mesoret ha-Talmud* and why is the title different than the present day *Mesoret ha-Shas*? In reality, R. Boaz authored neither *Mesoret ha-Talmud* nor a book titled *Mesoret ha-Shas*.



Mesoret ha-Talmud, 1523

There is agreement that the first edition of the work *Mesoret ha-Talmud* was printed in 1523.⁵ The printing year is calculated using the word ז'ר"ע

⁵ The Bibliography of the Hebrew Book lists it as follows

(5)383 (1523).⁶ It was printed by Yehudah Gedaliah in Salonika but the work itself was anonymous. Like the *Mesoret ha-Shas*, the *Mesoret ha-Talmud* collects and identifies parallel passages in Talmud Bavli for twenty-nine *masekhtot*. But it is slightly different than *Mesoret ha-Shas*; the *Mesoret ha-Talmud* only provides citations to the chapter and not the page of the Talmudic text. According to Rabbinovicz and Heller, the anonymous author of *Mesoret ha-Talmud* is actually R. Boaz. Yet that appears to be impossible. R. Boaz wrote a commentary, *Shiltei ha-Giborim*, on R. Alfasi's Talmudic commentary. In the introduction to *Shiltei ha-Giborim*, first published in Sabionetta in 1554,⁷ Rav Yehoshua Boaz writes that he has been working on his "*Meleket Shamayim*" from the age of 23 until 36, his then age.⁸ That would put his date of birth at approximately 1518. He therefore could not have authored a book printed in 1523.

Let us examine the title page of the edition of the Talmud wherein R. Boaz's commentaries first appeared, the Giustiniani edition. Giustiniani was the second publisher to print a complete edition of the Talmud. Daniel Bomberg published his first edition between 1519/1520 and 1523. Bomberg eventually published three complete editions of the Talmud.⁹ Giustiniani's edition was published in Venice between 1546 and 1551. R. Boaz was one of the editors of this edition, which also included indices. The title page reads:

This heavenly work includes new additions not previously contained in prior editions; the citations of the *Mesoret ha-Talmud*; citations of

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מסורת התלמוד .
 ... מסכת שבת ... עירובין ... פסחים ... יומא ... ר"ה [ראש-השנה] ... סוכה ... מגלה ... תעניות
 ... חגיגה ... מועד קטן ... ברכות ... חולין ... יבמות ... קדושין ... כתובות ... גיטין ... סוטה ...
 נזיר ... נדרים ... נדה ... בבא קמא ... בבא מציעא ... בבא בתרא ... סנהדרין ... שבועות ...
 מכות ... הוריות ... ע"ז [עבודה זרה] ... עדיות.

[שאלוניקי]. דפוס יהודה לבית גדליה [רפ"ג]. 1523

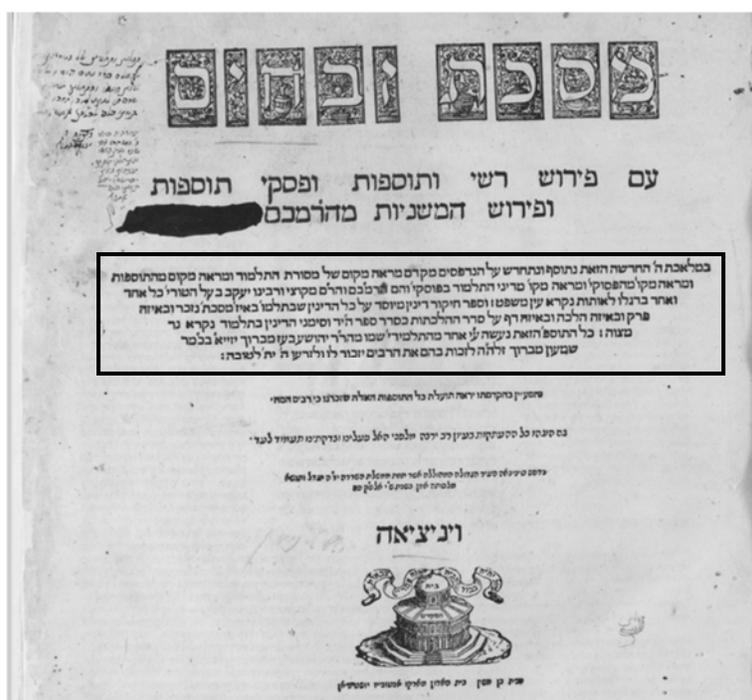
⁶ A note indicates that it was printed in the third year of the reign of סוליימן. This would have been 1523, as Suleiman the Magnificent was sultan of the Ottoman Empire from 1520 to 1566.

⁷ http://uli.nli.org.il/F/MAJ44XQRAFNDCEJC1RUKY8BNDUE8CXK3SPLRKQM5QHMUDIVHBF-39402?func=full-set-set&set_number=006968&set_entry=000012&format=999

⁸ He died in 1555. For biographical information see R. Shlomo Gottesman, "*Kuntres 'Elef ha-Magen*," Rebi Yehoshua Boaz Mi-Barukh and his Torah," *Yesburun* 20, 75-82.

⁹ For the history of the Bomberg editions, see Heller, *Printing of the Talmud*, 135-82.

Tosafot, citations of the *Poskim*, citations of the laws of the Talmud that appear in Rambam, R”M of Coucy, R. Yaakov the author of the *Turim*, each one corresponding to a unique letter and is titled *Ein Mishpat*. The work *Hoker Din* that is based upon all the laws found in the Talmud, with the corresponding tractate, chapter, law, and page number, using the system that appears in *Yad ha-Hazakah*, and citations to the laws in the Talmud, and is titled *Ner Mitzvah*. All of these additions were done by one of the students, whose name is our master and teacher R. Yehoshua Boaz ha-Mevorakh the son of the rabbi, Shimon Barukh, for the public good, and he [R. Yehoshua] and his descendants should be remembered for good.



Tractate Zevahim, Giustiniani, Venice
From the National Library of Israel

A careful reading of the title page makes clear that the citations “of the *Mesoret ha-Talmud*,” a stand-alone work, was included, and that R. Boaz only took credit for two works, *Ein Mishpat* and *Ner Mitzvah*.¹⁰ Although not mentioned on the title page, there is a significant change to the citations that appear in *Mesoret ha-Talmud*; it now identifies the specific page

¹⁰ The history of the printing of the *Ein Mishpat* and *Ner Mitzvah*, in addition to *Torah Or*, is beyond the scope of this article.

From then on, in most editions of the Talmud the *Mesoret ha-Talmud/Shas* was attributed to R. Boaz. For example, in the *Orphans of Solomon Proops* edition of the Talmud from the mid-1700s, the lengthy paragraph describing all of the changes incorporated in the Giustiniani edition is omitted and instead an abridged version simply groups all the titles together: "with the citations in Rashi and Tosafot, and *Torah Or*, and *Ner Mitzvah*, and *Mesoret ha-Shas*, and *Ein Mishpat...*"



Hagigah, Title Page. Amsterdam 1744
 Courtesy of a Private Collector
 Tractate *Hagigah*, *Orphans of Solomon Proops*, Amsterdam, Mid-1700s
 From Marvin Heller, *Printing of the Talmud*

Now that we have established that R. Boaz was not the author of *Mesoret ha-Talmud*, nor did he take credit for the work, we have to examine how and when the title changed to *Mesoret ha-Shas*. One might (erroneously) argue that although R. Boaz never authored *Mesoret ha-Talmud*, nevertheless he was the author of a new work, *Mesoret ha-Shas*. As discussed above, however, the original title page that Boaz printed makes no mention of *Mesoret ha-Shas*. Nor was there any other work with that title published during R. Boaz's lifetime. Instead, *Mesoret ha-Talmud* and *Mesoret ha-Shas* are the same book.

In 1553, Pope Julius III banned the printing of the Talmud, which resulted in the burning of thousands of copies of the Talmud (including most copies of the Giustiniani edition). In 1564, the Council of Trent reversed that decision and permitted the publication of the Talmud—but with numerous restrictions and modifications. In particular, the Council found the very word “Talmud” offensive to Christian religious sensibilities. So, an alternative vocabulary was employed; Talmud was now “Gemara” or “Shas.” The Church also imposed severe restrictions on passages that relate to non-Jews. Thus, when the Talmud was finally reprinted in Basel beginning in 1578, the entire tractate *Avodah Zarah* was omitted. Additionally, in the volumes that were printed, all references to Talmud were revised to one of the acceptable terms. This included the title page. The Basel edition used the Giustiniani edition and R. Boaz's additions, reprinted the same title page language, but with a slight modification to one of the book's titles. The *Mesoret ha-Talmud* is now the *Mesoret ha-Shas*.



Tractate Bava Kamma, Basel, ca. 1578
 From Marvin Heller, *Printing of the Talmud*

Thus, there is no book titled *Mesoret ha-Shas*; that title is simply the result of Church censorship, and certainly not a work by R. Boaz.

A clear summary of this history, including the history of *Mesoret ha-Talmud* and specifically what R. Boaz added, appears in the *Oz Vebadar* edition of the Talmud (2006) which writes,

"מסורת התלמוד" נדפס מקודם כספר בשאלוניקי שנת רפ"ג ע"י דון יהודה גדליה. אבל הוא נחבר טרם שהיה התלמוד בדפוס, והוא מציין המסורת על פי הפרקים, ורבי יהושע בעז הוא שהוסיף את דפי הדפוס בנוסף על הפרק.

R. Boaz's Modifications of *Mesoret ha-Talmud*

Let us now examine some of the ways that R. Boaz diverged from *Mesoret ha-Talmud*.¹³

If we look at *Shabbat* 60b, we find that the *sugya* of יום טוב "אין בין יום טוב" לשבת אלא אוכל נפש בלבד" is cross referenced as follows:

דעתן אין בין יום טוב לשבת אלא אוכל נפש בלבד
תולין מגילה פק' ביצה פ' בתרא פ' כל הכלים אוכל נפש
יהודה אינה שם

פ' נוטל, ופי' תולין, מגילה פק' (פרק קמא), ביצה פ' בתרא פ' כל הכלים, אבל פלוגתא דרבי יהודה אינה שם.

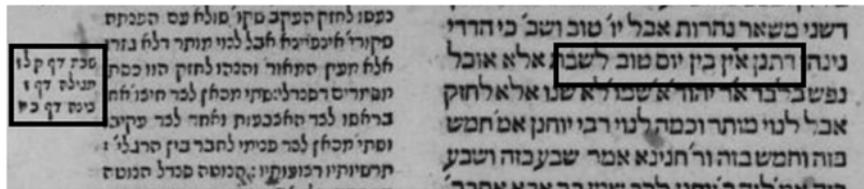
Since the original *Mesoret ha-Talmud* was not based on the Venice, Bomberg edition (1520-1523) which had just appeared, it does not contain the page numbers, leaving it to the reader to flip through a *perek* until he found the reference.

1. First we are told to look in *Masekhet Shabbat* in *perek Notel* (17th *perek* ("כל הכלים נוטלין")) where we find the referenced source in our *Gemara* on 124a. This source does not include the *Tanna* Rabbi Yehudah's opinion that *מכשירי אוכל נפש* are also permitted on Yom Tov.
2. Second, we are told to look at *perek Tolin* (20th *perek*), where we find the referenced source on *daf* 137b. This source does include Rabbi Yehudah's dissenting opinion.

¹³ *Mesoret ha-Talmud* was first printed as a stand-alone book in Salonika in [5]283 (1523) by Don Yehudah Gedaliah. It was printed before the printed editions of the Talmud, and the citations are only given with the corresponding chapter. R. Yehoshua Boaz was the one who added the page numbers to the chapter citations.

3. Third, we are told to look at *Megillah* "Perek Kamma." Here we find the main recording of this *halakhab*, as a *Mishnah* on 7b. It is followed by Rabbi Yehudah's opinion which is stated in the following passage of the Talmud.
4. Finally, we are told to look in the last *perek* of *Beẓab* called "כל הכלים". It turns out that there are two references in this *perek*: *Beẓab* 28a, which includes Rabbi Yehudah's opinion, and 36b, where it is stated without Rabbi Yehudah's dissenting opinion. Most likely, it is to this source, *Beẓab* 36b, to which *Mesoret ha-Talmud* refers when it states "אבל פלוגתא דרבי יהודה אינה שם".

The next iteration of the *Mesoret ha-Talmud* we will examine is in the Basel 1581 edition of *Masekhet Shabbat* 60b. By then, the name had been changed to *Mesoret ha-Shas*,¹⁴ and it had been positioned on the side of the page and modified by Rabbi Yehoshua Boaz. Only three references are listed, but possibly it is because only those include the *Mishnah* followed by Rabbi Yehudah's opinion. Nevertheless, the fact remains that Rav Yehoshua Boaz edited out three references that were included in the original source.¹⁵



Finally, we have the *Vilna Shas* of 1881 which goes back to listing all six sources in Talmud Bavli (even those which do not include Rabbi Yehudah's opinion) as was done in 1523 by *Mesoret ha-Talmud*.¹⁶ It seems as if this was important to those who wanted to improve this reference tool.

¹⁴ Heller, p. 243: "substituted in place of 'Talmud,' [were] 'Gemara' . . . 'Shas' [six orders] of Mishna."

¹⁵ <https://books.google.co.il/books?hl=iw&id=X8BSAAAACAAJ&q=%D7%91%D7%A1%D7%99%D7%9C%D7%99%D7%90%D7%94#v=onepage&q=%D7%91%D7%A1%D7%99%D7%9C%D7%99%D7%90%D7%94&f=false>

¹⁶ By then, *Mesoret ha-Shas* had been expanded upon by Rav Yosef Shmuel of Cracow and Rav Yeshayah Pick. *Mavo L'Shas* Vilna, J. Weinfeld (Jerusalem, 1994), p. 4.

כי הדדי ניהו **דחנן אין בין י"ט לשבת אלא אוכל נפש** בלבד א"ר יהודה אמר שמואל לא שנו אלא לחזק אבל לגוי מותר וכמה לגוי ר' יוחנן אמר חמש בזה וחמש בזה ור' חנינא

לגזירה שגזרו מחמת מאורע אף להס לגזור אלא מעין המאורע דשאני משאר נדרים . ברוב ח' בעומק : אלא לחזק . שמכמותו נעשו לחזק העקב שקורין שול"א עם

לקמן קבד קלז : מגלה ז : בי"ט כח . לו : [תוספ' דמגיל' פ"א]

It also includes the page number and a reference to the *Tosefta Megillab, Perek Aleph*, although it leaves out that it is *Halakhab* 8.

Another example of a change from the original "Mesoret ha-Talmud" to the newer effort by Rav Yehoshua Boaz can be found on *Eruvin* 2a.

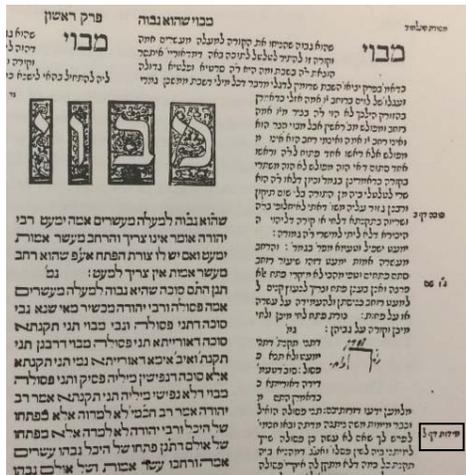
The entry in the original *Mesoret ha-Talmud* appears as follows:

פרקא קמא
הכשר מבוי בית שמאי אמרי
בלחי פריק כל כשני
 הכשר מבוי בית שמאי אמרים
 בלחי, פרק כל כתבי

There is no text at the beginning of *Eruvin* which begins with the words הכשר מבוי. Apparently, *Mesoret ha-Talmud* is referring to the fact that the first *Mishnah* in *Eruvin* speaks about fixing an alleyway so that it is permitted to carry within it, but leaves out information about how it is done. *Mesoret ha-Talmud* then tells us that the source for how to do this can be found later in *Masekhet Shabbat* 117a where it states,

דתנן הכשר מבוי ב"ש אומרים לחי וקורה וב"ה אומרים או לחי או קורה

In editing the Giustiniani edition, Rav Yehoshua Boaz understandably chose to eliminate this reference, although important, because it was not focused on words found on the page.



Tractate Eruvin, Giustiniani,
 Scan courtesy of Jewish Theological Seminary

Another interesting occurrence on the same page is towards the bottom of the picture where “*Mesoret ha-Talmud*” indicates to look at *Masekhet Middot daf* 36. This refers to the text that says “פתחו של היכל גבוה עשרים אמה”

Since *Masekhet Middot* is only *Mishnayot*, it is somewhat puzzling to be referred to as מידות דף ל”ו. Apparently, Rav Yehoshua Boaz was following the pagination of the Giustiniani Shas which was patterned after the Bomberg editions of Venice which printed the *Mishnayot* of *Masekhet Middot* after *Masekhet Meilah*, *Kinim* and *Tamid*. The *Mishnah* of “פתחו של היכל” was printed on *daf* 36b of that edition.

Mesoret ha-Talmud indicates that the *Mishnah* is found in “מידות פ”ד”, (without indicating it is *Mishnah* 1.)

It continued to be listed as מידות דף ל”ו for many hundreds of years, but by the time it was listed in the Vilna edition, it reverted to the type of listing in the *Mesoret ha-Talmud* of 1523 and is rendered “מידות פ”ד, מ”א” (פרק ד’, משנה א’).

Finally, we can see the issues a reader faced when looking at the original *Mesoret ha-Talmud* printed in 1523. On the same *daf*, *Erwin 2a* it gives us the following *Mareh Mekomot*,

פתח גובהו של היכל כ’ אמה אמות כ”ד
דתנן גובהו של היכל כ’ אמה

The correct text in the *Mishnah* is,

פתחו של היכל גובהו כ’ אמה

Another “*ta’ut defus*” looks like this,

אולם גובהו מ’ אמות מדות פרק אל ט”ו
אולם גובהו מ’ אמות מדות פרק שלישי

The correct text in *Middot* 3:7 (which deals with the measurements of the *Beit HaMikdash*) is

אולם גובהו מ’ אמות

Although *Mesoret ha-Shas* has undergone major changes since its inception, it was always a helpful tool to those who studied the Talmud. It should be appreciated for its revolutionary nature at that time. ❧