

Creation and Composition

The Contribution of the
Bavli Redactors (Stammim) to the Aggada

Edited by
JEFFREY L. RUBENSTEIN

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Jeffrey L. Rubenstein

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Preface

The papers collected in this volume were presented at a conference sponsored by the Skirball Department of Hebrew and Judaic Studies of New York University, February 9–10, 2003. I am grateful to Lawrence Schiffman, chairman of the department, for his support, and to Shayne Figueroa and Diane Leon-Ferdico, the departmental administrators, for all their efforts in logistics and organization.

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October 3, 2005
New York, NY

Jeffrey L. Rubenstein

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Introduction

by

Jeffrey L. Rubenstein

Critical Talmud study is founded on the distinction between two primary literary strata: *meimrot*, traditions attributed to named sages (the Amoraim, c. 200–450 CE), on the one hand, and *setam hatalmud*, the unattributed or anonymous material, on the other. These literary strata differ in style: attributed traditions tend to be brief, apodictic statements of law; the anonymous material contains dialectical argumentation, commentary and analysis. Because the anonymous material generally provides context for, and analysis of, the attributed statements, it functions as a type of editing or redaction for those traditions.

The consensus of academic Talmud scholars is that the two literary strata differ not only stylistically but chronologically: the anonymous material post-dates the attributed statements. The sages who composed that anonymous stratum are therefore designated “post-Amoraic redactors” or “Stammaim.” Scholars have increasingly recognized the prominent role of these redactors in the composition of the Bavli. They did not act as passive conduits, merely recording the traditions they received for posterity, nor did they limit themselves to succinct glosses designed to provide minimal requisite explanations. On the contrary, they added extensive discussions and commentary to the terse Amoraic traditions they received, juxtaposed them with related traditions, contextualized them in a larger discursive framework, and created the elaborate *sugyot* (literary units) that comprise the Bavli text: “Their hands were everywhere in the Talmud, and everything derives from them.”¹

This characterization pertains to the halakhic portions of the Bavli. It is based on the theories of David Weiss Halivni and Shamma Friedman, who independently proposed that the anonymous, redactional layer post-dated attributed traditions and established criteria by which the two strata could be separated. Their early researches and the studies of many who built upon their foundation concentrated on halakhic *sugyot*, distinguishing the two strata and identifying the pervasive redactional hand in the creation of the Bavli.

¹ David Weiss Halivni, *Megorot umesorot* (Jerusalem: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1982), 3:11.

Of the Bavli aggada this question – the extent of the post-Amoraic or Stammaitic contribution – has received much less attention. Did the redactors make a significant contribution to the aggada of the Bavli? Did they create extensive “aggadic *sugyot*” in the same way as they produced lengthy and complex halakhic *sugyot*? Did they subject Amoraic aggadic traditions to the same processes of expansion and reworking as Amoraic halakhic dicta? If so, can the Stammaitic component of aggada be separated from the Amoraic core in the same way as the Stammaitic halakhic stratum generally can be distinguished from the underlying Amoraic statements? Just as certain legal terminology and abstract concepts are found exclusively in the Stammaitic stratum, do we find some aggadic phraseology and theological concepts only in Stammaitic aggada? If we can sketch legal history by observing development from the Amoraic to Stammaitic periods, can we speak of ethical, theological or historiographical change by tracing changes in Amoraic and Stammaitic aggada?

To address these questions I organized a small conference at New York University. This was the Conference Statement sent to invitees:

*Creation and Composition: The Contribution
of the Bavli Redactors (Stammaim) to the Aggada.*

On Sunday, February 9th and Monday, February 10th 2003 the Skirball Department of Hebrew and Judaic Studies of New York University will sponsor a conference, dedicated to *The Contribution of the Bavli Redactors (Stammaim) to the Aggada*, that is, to all non-legal portions of the Bavli, including midrash, narratives, theology, historiography and liturgical texts.

A cornerstone of academic study of the Bavli is the distinction between the Amoraic and post-Amoraic or Stammaitic strata. Most Talmudic research to date has concentrated on halakhic portions of the Bavli where the signs of the two strata are most apparent. However, in recent years a number of studies have identified evidence of Stammaitic reworking of aggadic material. The purpose of this conference is to continue these efforts to document the nature and extent of the role of the Stammaim in Bavli aggada. Presentations may deal with macro or micro issues; they may be large overviews, analyses of specific *sugyot* or sources, or discussions of methodological issues.

The conference will be small, consisting of 10–12 presentations by specialists for specialists. Papers will be submitted and circulated before the conference so as to allow maximum time for discussion. The papers will hopefully be published as a volume of collected studies.

Thirteen papers were presented at the conference, seven of which were circulated beforehand, and twelve of which comprise the essays of this volume, together with one additional paper. The schedule left ample time for questions, comments and analysis. The extremely high level of discussion and wonderful atmosphere of collegiality, though they cannot be reproduced exactly in this forum, left their mark on the papers, which have been substantially revised in light of the comments and criticisms raised at the conference. Before introducing

the essays, however, it is fitting to summarize some of the history of scholarship regarding the question of the redactors and the aggada of the Bavli.

Previous Scholarship

Even before the theories of Halivni and Friedman gained widespread acceptance such that the question of the redactors/Stammaim and the aggada could be posed, a number of studies, though devoted primarily to other issues, produced insights and conclusions relevant to this topic.²

In 1982 Daniel Sperber published “On the Unfortunate Adventures of Rav Kahana: A Passage of Saboraic Polemic from Sasanian Persia,” an analysis of the lengthy story found in bBQ 117a–b.³ Sperber dated this narrative to Saboraic times largely on the basis of its content. At the conclusion of the story the Babylonian sage Rav Kahana teaches the great Palestinian master R. Yohanan “all his Torah” prompting R. Yohanan to concede that true mastery of Torah is now to be found in Babylonia.⁴ This polemic insisting on the superiority of Babylonian tradition resembles that of Pirkoy ben Baboy, the eighth century tract that claimed Palestinian halakha had been hopelessly corrupted by persecutions of the Byzantine era while the Babylonian tradition had been passed down without disruption or discontinuity.⁵ Sperber’s primary interest here was the literary analysis of the story and the identification of Persian motifs; the article was published in a collection entitled *Irano-Judaica: studies relating to Jewish contacts with Persian culture throughout the ages*. Thus the depiction of R. Yohanan seated atop seven cushions resembles portrayals of Persian holy men known from seventh–eighth century Iranian art. Likewise, the description of R. Yohanan’s drooping eyebrows propped up by a silver stick is a motif attested in Medieval Iranian literature.⁶ At the same time, Sperber’s dating of the story has

² Halivni first published his theory in the second volume of *Meqorot umesorot*, which appeared in 1975. Friedman set forth his theory and methodology in an introduction to his commentary on the tenth chapter of Yevamot entitled “Al derekh heqer hasugya” (“On the Method of Critical Research of the Sugya,”) in *Mehqarim umeqorot*, ed. H. Dimitrovski (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1977), 283–321. Naturally it took some time before their work was read, absorbed and accepted by other scholars.

³ In *Irano-Judaica*, ed. S. Shaked (Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi, 1982), 83–100.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 91–93. The sense of R. Yohanan’s concession is somewhat obscure; see Sperber’s discussion p. 86 nn. 21 and 22, and pp. 96–98.

⁵ Pirqoy b. Baboy may have been a student of Rav Yehudai Gaon who directed the Suran academy from 757–61 CE; see Shalom Spiegel, “Lefarashat hapolmos shel pirqoi ben baboi,” *Harry Austryn Wolfson Jubilee Volume*, eds. S. Lieberman et al. (Jerusalem: American Academy for Jewish Research, 1965), 243–74; Robert Brody, *The Geonim of Babylonia and the Shaping of Medieval Jewish Culture* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998), 113–14.

⁶ Sperber, *ibid.*, 90–91

tremendous implications vis-à-vis the composition of aggada in the Bavli. If the “Saboraic” dating is accepted, then substantial portions of Bavli aggada – not only isolated glosses and minor comments – were produced in post-Amoraic times. Indeed, while there is some confusion about the dating of the redactors/Stammaim and whether they predate the Saboraim or should be identified with early Saboraim, Sperber’s locating the story in the cultural context of Pirkoy ben Baboy and even of the controversy between Saadia Gaon and Aaron ben Meir (tenth century) points to extensive aggadic creativity in extremely late times.⁷ How much the more should we then expect aggadic production in the early post-Amoraic era.

Almost contemporaneous with Sperber’s article there appeared Shaye Cohen’s “Patriarchs and Scholarchs” (1981).⁸ Cohen compared the rabbinic patriarch (Nasi), portrayed as the head of the rabbinic school, to the Greek “scholarch,” the leader of a philosophical academy, pointing out numerous parallels between the two offices. At the end of the article, however, Cohen noted that his conclusions were based on the “fundamental historicity” of the rabbinic accounts, an untenable hypothesis considering that “the Babylonian Talmud has an unfortunate habit of transmitting fictional or highly embellished accounts of the internal affairs of the Palestinian patriarchate.”⁹ (That “unfortunate habit” opens fruitful avenues for study and constitutes part of the motivation for this volume!) Indeed, Cohen’s best evidence came from two lengthy Bavli narratives that differ extensively from their Palestinian parallels. He therefore raised the possibility that “the parallels between patriarchs and scholarchs tell us more about the Hellenization of Babylonian Jewry in the fourth and fifth centuries than about Hellenization of Palestinian Jewry in the second.”¹⁰

Twenty years later this question – which I would frame more in terms of “academization” than Hellenization – can be answered affirmatively. The issue then centers on the identity of those responsible for the “fictional or highly embellished accounts” that portray the patriarch as a “scholarch,” whether the Babylonian Amoraic or Stammaim. In light of David Goodblatt’s comprehensive study demonstrating that Babylonian Amoraic congregated in small disciple circles rather than academic institutions, we should conclude that the depiction of the patriarch as the head of a rabbinic academy devolves from post-Amoraic times.¹¹ The Bavli redactors, operating in academic, social and institutional

⁷ Shamma Friedman’s recent analysis, “The Further Adventures of Rav Kahana,” *The Talmud Yerushalmi and Graeco-Roman Culture III*, ed P. Schäfer (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2002), 259–63, demonstrates that the story of Rav Kahana has borrowed numerous locations and motifs from the story of the death of R. Eleazar b. R. Shimon of bBM 84a–b, which is itself a late narrative. The tradition history therefore tends to confirm the late dating.

⁸ Shaye J. D. Cohen, “Patriarchs and Scholarchs,” *PAAR* 48 (1981), 57–86.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 85.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ David Goodblatt, *Rabbinic Instruction in Sasanian Babylonia* (Leiden: Brill, 1975).

contexts that differed from those of the Amoraim, reworked accounts of the Palestinian patriarchs in light of their experience.

In a footnote to his observation cited above of the Bavli's "fictional or highly embellished accounts" of the Palestinian patriarchate, Cohen adduced bHor 13b–14a, the story of the plot of R. Meir and R. Natan to depose Rabban Shimon b. Gamaliel, which he designated an "aggadic expansion of tSanh 7:8 and yBik 3:3, 65c."¹² Not long after Cohen's study Goodblatt himself devoted an extensive analysis to this text (1984).¹³ Goodblatt essentially concurred with Cohen, describing the story as a "Babylonian fiction," a "Babylonian development and expansion," and a "free literary creation."¹⁴ His evidence included linguistic terms unique to the Bavli such as the Persian word *qamera* referring to a decorative belt, and narrative motifs attested elsewhere in the Bavli but never in Palestinian sources. Most importantly, the tripartite division of power among three offices pictured in the story, namely Head of Academy, Sage and Head of the Court, is not reflected in Palestinian traditions, but recalls the tripartite division of offices of the Exilarch's administration known from Geonic sources. Though not venturing a precise date, Goodblatt tended to attribute the story to late Babylonian Amoraim, speculating that it pointed to tensions between the sages and the exilarch in Babylonia – he seems not to have entertained the possibility that the story could have originated in post-Amoraic times.¹⁵ But in light of the theories of Halivni and Friedman, the parallels to the Geonic sources should perhaps be taken at face value to point to a post-Amoraic date of composition.

The articles of Cohen, Goodblatt and Sperber dovetail nicely. Each scholar recognized that the Bavli's depictions of Palestinian sages and their academy conflict with the parallel representations in the Palestinian sources themselves. In each case the Bavli story portrays a thriving academic institution populated by numerous students, characterized by competition for status and governed by a hierarchy of leaders. Convergence of this type is important as it suggests that later sages may have reworked narratives to address central issues of importance to them, and that dominant aspects of their cultural world may be identified.¹⁶

This realization that Bavli stories and biographical anecdotes were not reliable historical sources, that they could be "fictionalized or highly embellished accounts" as Cohen put it, should also be contextualized within another trend

¹² Cohen, *ibid.*, 84 n. 68

¹³ David Goodblatt, "The Story of the Plot Against R. Simeon B. Gamaliel II," *Zion* 49 (1984), 349–74 (Hebrew).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 350, 358, 371 (*hamtsa 'a bavlit*).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 371–72.

¹⁶ Subsequent research seems to confirm that depictions of highly developed academies, though often set in Tannaitic times, are found exclusively in Bavli narratives bearing indications of late composition, which should be attributed to the redactors. See Jeffrey L. Rubenstein, "The Rise of the Babylonian Talmudic Academy: A Reexamination of the Talmudic Evidence," *Jewish Studies, an Internet Journal* (<http://www.biu.ac.il/JS/JSIJ/jsij1.html>; 2002).

of rabbinic scholarship. In the 1970s and 1980s scholars became more aware of the “literary” character of rabbinic stories and midrashim, more sensitive to the literary processes that created differences among “parallel” versions of traditions found in various rabbinic compilations, and more conscious of the problems involved in the use of rabbinic sources for historical purposes. In a series of studies Jacob Neusner demonstrated that later rabbinic texts consistently embellished versions received from earlier sources. As stories were transmitted from generation to generation they were changed, augmented and reworked to serve the needs of the storytellers.¹⁷ Yonah Fraenkel documented the literary characteristics of rabbinic narratives, including paronomasia, irony and chiasmic structuring, and concluded that these texts should be seen as “literary-artistic creations,” that is, fictions.¹⁸ And Joseph Heinemann’s detailed study of *Leviticus Rabbah* revealed the strong hand of the compiler in constructing a midrashic work with marked ideological tendencies.¹⁹ These methodological advances had enormous consequences. If the genre of the rabbinic story was dramatic narrative or fiction rather than history, and if midrash could be seen as literature as much as exegesis, then the scholar had to expect that aggadic traditions, like much ancient oral literature, were extremely malleable, subject to change as different “authors” or storytellers reworked their sources for their own purposes. In the context of Bavli scholarship, the question then became: who reworked earlier traditions and by what techniques and methods?

A long and detailed study by Shamma Friedman broke new ground on the question, constituting a substantive advance from these tantalizing suggestions and inferences to cogent demonstration of the workings of the redactors. An abbreviated version of the article was published in English in 1987 followed by the full version in Hebrew in 1993 entitled “La’aggada hahistorit batalmud habavli” (“On the Historical Aggada of the Babylonian Talmud.”)²⁰ Friedman

¹⁷ See for example: Jacob Neusner, *Development of a Legend: Studies on the Traditions Concerning Yohanan ben Zakkai* (Leiden: Brill, 1970), and *The Rabbinic Traditions about the Pharisees before 70* (3 vols; Leiden: Brill, 1971).

¹⁸ Yonah Fraenkel, “Hermeneutic Problems in the Study of the Aggadic Narrative” *Tarbiz* 47 (1978), 139–172 (Hebrew); “Bible Verses quoted in Tales of the Sages,” *Scripta Hierosolymitana* 22 (1971), 80–99; “Paronomasia in Aggadic Narratives,” *Scripta Hierosolymitana* 27 (1978), 27–51; “The Structure of Talmudic Legends,” *Folklore Research Center Studies* 7 (1983), 45–97 (Hebrew). Much of Fraenkel’s earlier work is synthesized in *Darkhe ha’aggada vehamidrash* (Masada: Yad Letalmud, 1991).

¹⁹ J. Heinemann, “The Art of Composition in *Leviticus Rabbah*,” *Hasifrut* 2 (1969–1971), 809–834 (Hebrew); idem, “Profile of a Midrash: The Art of Composition in *Leviticus Rabba*,” *JAAR* 31 (1971), 141–50.

²⁰ Shamma Friedman, “Literary Development and Historicity in the Aggadic Narrative of the Babylonian Talmud: A Study based upon *B.M.* 83b–86a,” *Community and Culture: Essays in Jewish Studies in Honor of the Ninetieth Anniversary of the founding of Gratz College*, ed. N. Waldman (Philadelphia: Gratz College, 1987), 67–80; “La’aggada hahistorit batalmud habavli,” *Saul Lieberman Memorial Volume*, ed. Shamma Friedman (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1993), 119–63;

explored the lengthy aggadic composition found at bBM 83b–86a, arguing that the Bavli's sources included two collections of aggada extant in Palestinian compilations. The sequence of traditions was therefore independent and prior to the Bavli compilers, who had then glossed, reworked, embellished and otherwise expanded the earlier framework. Other than identifying the "literary sources of the rich aggadic material included in the Babylonian Talmud," the primary thrust of the article was historiographical: Friedman argued that historians must identify the "literary kernel" of rabbinic traditions before making judgments about the historical kernel. He repeatedly pointed out how scholars had mistakenly based conclusions on data culled from traditions within the Bavli despite the fact that the original versions of those sources preserved in the Palestinian documents lacked that data. These historians, in other words, based their conclusions upon literary reworkings of no historical worth. Yet Friedman was also interested in "the way the *BT* used and reworked its aggadic sources"²¹ and illustrated these methods in great detail. The "Bavli aggadists" (*ba'alei ha'aggada*) transferred material from elsewhere in the Bavli, duplicated motifs found in their Palestinian sources to fashion additional episodes or new stories, and added connecting phrases to link together disparate traditions thereby creating a smooth narrative flow. Friedman even observed a "widespread phenomenon," that the markers of the Bavli's expansions tend to be "concentrated in another place, as if that chapter and that *sugya* lay open before the composer of the *gemara* (*ba'al hagemara*)."²²

As Friedman was not trying to answer the questions of who exactly was responsible for the changes and when they occurred, he used a variety of terms to refer to the responsible parties: Aside from the "composer of the *gemara*" in the citation above, he referred to "the Talmud," "composer of the Talmud/*gemara* (*ba'al hataalmud/gemara*)," "composers of the *aggada* (*ba'alei ha'aggada*)," "redactor of the Bavli" (*mesader habavli*), "composers of the unattributed portion of the Talmud (*ba'alei sham hataalmud*)," and "late redactors of *aggada* (*mesadrei aggada me'uharim*)."²³ In the English version, however, Friedman consistently referred to the "redactor" or "editor" of the passage.²⁴ At all events, the processes he describes are redactional – transferring material, joining traditions, creating transitions – and are reminiscent of the methods employed by the redactors of halakhic *sugyot*. Thus, although he focused on several other issues, Friedman's article provided powerful evidence that the Bavli redactors played a weighty role in the creation of the Bavli aggada.

Friedman's article serves as a convenient transition to studies that focus directly on the redactors' contribution to aggada. Louis Jacobs was among the first,

²¹ "Literary Development and Historicity in the Aggadic Narrative," 67.

²² "La'aggada hahistorit," 139 n. 106.

²³ *Ibid.*, 139, 120, 124, 121, 128 n. 38, 137.

²⁴ "Literary Development and Historicity in the Aggadic Narrative," 67, 69, 74, etc.

to my knowledge, to document the high literary artistry of what he termed an “aggadic *sugya*” in an article entitled, “The Sugya on Sufferings in B. Berakhot 5a, b” (1981).²⁵ Jacobs presented a literary analysis and structure of the *sugya* delineating units of three, repetitions of formal phrases and an arrangement that builds up to a “happy ending,” which illustrated the “editors’ striving for literary effect and the element of contrivance.” Extremely significant was his observation, “Although the *sugya* is aggadic, it consistently utilizes Halakhic-type argumentation,” and suggestion, “I would maintain that a careful examination of other aggadic passages in the Babylonian Talmud exhibit similar forms, so that the style of presentation of Aggadah, as distinct from its content, differs little from that which is to be seen in the purely halakhic *sugyot*.”²⁶ This sense of the affinities between aggadic and halakhic *sugyot* suggests that the same editors contributed to both genres.

Precisely this was Jacobs’ contention in a larger work published a decade later, after the theories of Halivni and Friedman had become established (*Structure and Form in the Babylonian Talmud*, 1991).²⁷ Here he analyzed numerous *sugyot*, both halakhic and aggadic, as well as narratives, paying close attention to their literary traits, structure and divergence from Palestinian parallels. The concluding chapter summed up his findings of the techniques with which the “author/editors” of the Bavli reworked their earlier sources, and attributed to them a major role in shaping the material:

In the light of our investigation, it is necessary to go much further than Halivni to see the Stammaim as far more than mere editors of earlier material. They were, in fact, creative authors who shaped the material they had to hand to provide the new literary form evident in the passages we have examined, and, indeed, on practically every page of the Babylonian Talmud.²⁸

Here we see explicitly how Halivni’s theory helped to account for the differences between the Bavli and its sources, an explanatory mechanism that Sperber, Cohen and Goodblatt lacked. Yet Jacobs was actually extending Halivni’s theory in more ways than acknowledged in this paragraph: because his examples included aggadic *sugyot* and narratives, his conclusion amounts to the claim that the Stammaim were “creative authors” of these genres as well.

The focus shifted from matters of style, which preoccupied Jacobs, to content in an important article by Yaakov Elman. As the title “Righteousness as its own

²⁵ Louis Jacobs, “The Sugya on Sufferings in B. Berakhot 5a,b,” *Studies in Aggadah, Targum and Jewish Liturgy in Memory of Joseph Heineman*, ed. J. J. Petuchowski and E. Fleischer (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1981), 32–44.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 41, 43.

²⁷ Louis Jacobs, *Structure and Form in the Babylonian Talmud* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 105

reward: An Inquiry into the Theology of the Stam” (1990)²⁹ suggests, Elman explored whether the Stammaitic portions of various Bavli passages evinced consistent perspectives on theodicy that differed from those attested in Amoraic traditions. He concluded: “The difference in approach to the problem of theodicy between some Babylonian sources and earlier and contemporary Palestinian sources is due in part to the work of the Stammaim, who strove to disconnect the hitherto all-but-inseparable nexus between suffering and sin.”³⁰ In contrast to Palestinian traditions, the Stammaim, developing ideas associated with the Babylonian Amora Rava, suggest that “there is death without sin, and suffering without transgression.”³¹

Elman thus accomplished for a theological topic that which scholars had been fruitfully demonstrating for a variety of legal issues: that one can trace diachronic development from the Amoraic to Stammaitic periods. Just as the Amoraim and Stammaim often differed in their legal rulings, concepts and terminology, so they differed in their theological outlook as well. This study illustrates the potential payoff of an analysis of the aggadic contribution of the Stammaim. Parallel to the rich advances in our knowledge of the development of Jewish law, we have a window into the development of Jewish theology and culture.

In some recent work on Bavli narratives, I attempted to build on Friedman’s study of the techniques of the redactors. In detailed analyses of six of the longer Bavli narratives, I argued that the differences between these narratives and the earlier versions attested in Palestinian sources should be attributed to the redactors, who reworked their sources with techniques similar to those with which they created halakhic sugyot. I also continued Elman’s interests in content by identifying some of the themes and motifs that appear consistently in these late Bavli narratives but not in the Palestinian sources, which may point to the principal interests and cultural situation of the Stammaim. These include a hierarchically structured and well populated rabbinic academy, verbal violence and competitiveness among the sages, dialectical argumentation, public humiliation and great respect for exalted lineage.³²

The preceding comments are not meant to be a comprehensive survey; other books and articles could be mentioned that recognize the role of the redactors in narrative, midrashic and historiographic portions of the Bavli.³³ But they

²⁹ Yaakov Elman, “Righteousness as its Own Reward: An Inquiry into the Theologies of the Stam,” *PAAJR* 57 (1990–91), 38.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 35–36.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 63.

³² Jeffrey L. Rubenstein, *Talmudic Stories: Narrative Art, Composition, and Culture* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 268–82; *idem*, *The Culture of the Babylonian Talmud* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), *passim*.

³³ See e.g. Yaakov Elman, “The Suffering of the Righteous in Palestinian and Babylonian Sources,” *JQR* 80 (1990), 315–40; Michael Satlow, “‘Wasted Seed,’ The History of a Rabbinic

provide a sense of the history of scholarship that created the impetus for the present volume.

Summary of Articles

The studies collected here continue these efforts to delineate the nature and extent of the Bavli redactors' contributions to aggada and narrative. They vary in subject and scope: some offer a literary and source-critical analysis of a lengthy aggadic *sugya* or group of narratives (Gray, Friedman, Rovner, Schiffman); others trace a certain idea or topic in various aggadic sources (Moscovitz, Hezser). Some papers explicate aspects of the historiography of the redactors (Schremer, Boyarin), their theological stances (Moscovitz), their social structure (Hezser), and historical setting (Halivni). Some attempt to describe elements of the narrative art and compositional methods of the Bavli through close reading of selected aggadot (Steinmetz, Levinson), while others are devoted to elements of culture (Elman) and scholarly method (Rubenstein). A comprehensive reading of the papers reveals that a number of issues are still under contention. Some authors embrace Halivni's term "Stammaim," and presumably the concomitant historical and chronological theory, while others prefer "redactors" or "anonymous stratum," labels which leave open the precise historical and social setting.³⁴ Some authors posit a clean break between the Amoraic and post-Amoraic periods, while others assume more of a continuum, and ascribe the initial phases of some of the changes they examine to the late Amoraic period. Nevertheless, this volume, in my opinion, serves as a convenient marker of the emerging scholarly consensus regarding the prominent contribution of the redactors to the aggada of the Bavli. The historian who looks back at scholarship on the halakhic portions of the Bavli over the past three decades since the seminal publications of Halivni and Friedman in the mid 1970s will be hard pressed to pinpoint one specific moment at which the theory of the post-Amoraic/Stammaitic provenance of the anonymous stratum became the consensus. Yet today hardly a credible scholar can be found who does not subscribe to this theory. So too, I believe, will prove the case with Bavli aggada.

Idea," *HUCA* 55, 1994), 137–75; David Kraemer, *The Mind of the Talmud: An Intellectual History of the Talmud* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 184–210; Shulamit Valler, *Woman and Womanhood in the Stories of the Babylonian Talmud* (Tel-Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuhad, 1993) (Hebrew); Eliezer Segal, *The Babylonian Esther Midrash: A Critical Commentary* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994); Ofra Meir, *Rabbi Judah the Patriarch: Palestinian and Babylonian Portrait of a Leader* (Tel-Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuhad, 1999), 338–46.

³⁴ For the latter, see the articles by Friedman, Levinson, and Steinmetz.

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