**The Traditions of the Babylonian Talmud according to the Cairo Geniza Fragments**

**Detailed description of the research program**

1. Scientific Background

Over the past few decades, research on the text of the Babylonian Talmud has introduced us to the existence of different traditions of the Talmud in some of the tractates and chapters of the Talmud. While a number of these traditions have been uncovered in full manuscripts, the most impressive and important discoveries have appeared in Eastern Geniza copies, representing traditions of the Babylonian Talmud that were unknown up to this point.

Comparing the traditions in these places teaches us about a high degree of textual fluidity in the transmission of these texts and reveals a wealth of textual phenomena that are not ordinarily found in the complete textual witnesses. It is difficult to exaggerate the importance of these findings to the understanding of the history of the Babylonian Talmud – its contents, language, the manner in which it was transmitted, its ancient form, and, on some level, how it was edited.

The problem is that the findings that have been published up to this point are not sufficient to establish a concrete description of the history of the Talmud in its late editing stage and at its beginnings as a redacted work. Generally speaking, research on the text of the Babylonian Talmud is carried out in the context of the study of given chapters or tractates, the pace of the research is deliberate, and the discovery of unknown traditions that differ significantly from the prevalent tradition is a rare occurrence. This situation encouraged me to undertake a research project entitled "Unknown Traditions of the Babylonian Talmud Preserved in the Cairo Geniza," which focused on identifying and studying unknown traditions that were preserved in Geniza fragments. Work on this project commenced in 2012, and it was carried out with the assistance of the Israel Science Foundation (No. 1263/11). In the course of the project we reviewed approximately 350 Geniza fragments that contained significant differences in comparison with the prevalent text.

In the course of our review we compared the text of the fragments with the printed version, we characterized the significant differences between them, and we developed an organized list of the fragments that were examined. The list included our assessment of how likely it was that each fragment represented an alternative textual tradition of the Talmud. Once the review was completed, we chose seven copies from seven different chapters that represented the most wide-ranging and notable phenomena. These copies were subjected to a systematic and comprehensive analysis. The clear conclusion was that the selected copies did, in fact, represent a previously unknown, alternative tradition of the Talmud. The most notable results of five of the research projects have been published (10, 94. A copy of No. 10 can be obtained from the Foundation upon special request from the reviewer) or have been submitted for publication. Research on one further example is almost complete, while another is in the advanced stages of preparation.

With only one exception, in all of the traditions that were studied the phenomenon of fluid transmission stands out. At the same time, each one of the traditions contained unique phenomena, including some that have not been described in any research up to this point. With the addition of these seven traditions to those previously published, together with the organized list of fragments that can enable the identification of additional fragments that may represent unknown traditions of the Talmud, a comprehensive research project examining the unknown traditions of the Babylonian Talmud is possible for the first time. This study will also allow us to suggest a preliminary description of the conclusions of the research on the traditions, describing the history of the Babylonian Talmud at the end of the period of its redaction and at the beginning of its transmission. These are the goals of the proposed research study.

**The History of this Research**

Up until the second half of the twentieth century, little attention was paid to the different text-traditions of the Babylonian Talmud (see, for example, Marcus [9]). One exception was a rare but notable finding that was discovered in the nineteenth century, in Tractate *Temura*. (Frankel [4], Brill [3] and others). In both printed editions and manuscripts of this tractate we find passages that are presented as *lishna aharina* – an alternative version – a which text differs significantly from that of the basisc text appearing in textual witnesses. According to Jacob Epstein, (15), the alternative passages in *Temura* are a consequence of the Talmud being taught orally, such that the different sages “formulated the same material, each one according to his own language, style of speech and dialect.” Eliezer Rosenthal (80), however, emphasized the major differences in content and subject matter found in the *lishna aharina* passages, concluding that they represent an alternative edition, its differences much more substantial than the those he found in *Pesahim* (see below). He even argued that there are two fragments, one from the Cairo Geniza and another found in an Italian binding, which represent this alternative edition. In a series of articles that were published in the course of the years 1930-1950, Epstein made another significant claim, suggesting the existence of another edition of the Talmud as represented in *Sefer haSheiltot* [16]. Studies many years later raised significant questions about Epsteins claims. These were based on new research approaches, a new understanding of how the different stages of the history of the Talmud are defined, and the fact that the *Sefer haSheiltot* is not a direct textual witness to the Talmud (Rosenthal [86], Brody [20]).

In 1957, Shraga Abramson published a facsimile edition of the MS New York version of Tractate *Avoda Zara*. In his introduction, Abramson describes "ancient versions of the Talmud" that appear in MS New York that are “absent in our texts." He presents examples of different types of variations, but never suggests that the manuscript version represents an alternative tradition, nor does he provide a comprehensive textual picture. Later in his introduction, Abramson describes the text of some Geniza fragments. In one, he points to significant variations, including "an alternative suggestion proposed by the *sugya*." In another he finds "a number of important things and many discrepancies with the printed version."

That same year, Eliezer Rosenthal presented his research findings regarding the text of the Babylonian Talmud's Tractate *Pesahim* (No. [85], in an asterisk note. His conclusions appeared in a number of publications and lectures – see, in particular, Nos. 82, 85, 86). While studying the redaction of Tractate *Pesahim*, he realized that the manuscripts on this tractate divide into two clear traditions – the prevalent tradition which he called "The Vulgate," and an alternative tradition that had been preserved mainly in two Yemenite manuscripts and in a Spanish manuscript, which he designated *lishna aharina*. For the first time a "family tree" had been established for manuscripts of the Babylonian Talmud. This also marked the first time that a description of two consecutive traditions—preserved in direct textual witnesses of the Babylonian Talmud—had been successfully established. Assessing the variations according to their characteristics, Rosenthal determined the major difference between the two versions– the *lishna aharina* contained similar content that was transmitted using alternative phraseology. The importance of these variants lies in the fact that we cannot suspect the "creators" of either version of making changes in order to correct the material that they had before them. According to Rosenthal, the variants in Tractate *Pesahim* illustrate a stage in which the Talmud was studied orally and its text had yet to be standardized; different transmitters expressed the same content, known by all but yet to be formulated linguistically.

Thanks to three new enterprises, this turning point in the history of research on the Babylonian Talmud was accompanied by significant improvement in the resources available to textual researchers:

1. The Institute of Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts, which was established in the 1950s. It is the largest database of Hebrew manuscript images in the world.

2. The Complete Israeli Talmud Institute began working on comparisons between different textual witnesses of all the tractates in the Babylonian Talmud in the middle of the 1940s. This material served as the foundation for the edition of the *Dikdukei Soferim haShalem* (beginning in 1972 [106]) and was made available to students and researchers.

3. The Mishna Project was initiated by E.E. Urbach and Yaacov Sussmann at the end of the 1960s. The goal of this ambitious project was to identify and record all direct textual witnesses – whether complete or fragmented – of Talmudic literature. This project was completed in 2012 with the publication of *Otzar Kitvei haYad haTalmudiyim* (35). Beginning in the 1970s the notes from this project have been made available to researchers, and they have served as the foundation for many studies on the text of Talmudic works, including studies on the Babylonian Talmud.

Beginning in the 1980s, Shamma Friedman published the results of his research on the sixth chapter of *Bava Metzia* in a number of different publications (mainly 68, 70, 71). As Rosenthal found in *Pesahim*, Friedman found that textual witnesses consistently divide into two main groups, even though the differences between the two "textual families" were not as substantial as those described in *Pesahim*. Moshe Benovitz describes the differences between the findings in the two tractates as follows: "Rosenthal described his findings as wide-ranging differences across entire *sugyot*…in contrast, Friedman describes two versions that consistently divide into specific and localized textual variations" (No. 18, pp. 12-13). According to Friedman, the differences between the two families in the sixth chapter of *Bava Metzia* relate to "the main character of the text – its strict formulation and its fixed and established framework." Friedman argued, therefore, that both transmission families apparently originated from shorter text, which was fixed and “finished.” This fixed text was further developed in each one of the transmission families. In one family, the changes were conservative and minimal; in the other they were active and creative. According to this description, the sixth chapter of *Bava Metzia* does not offer us a tradition that differs significantly from the prevalent tradition, even though two distinct families of text exist.

From that point on, the text of many chapters and tractates were studied, mainly by researchers from the Hebrew University and from Bar-Ilan University. Two researchers, S.Y. Wald (31) and A. Amit (60, 61), devoted their research to the text of two chapters in Tractate *Pesahim*. Employing research methodologies derived from Friedman’s studies, they arrived at conclusions that differed from those of Rosenthal with regard to *Pesahim*. The disparity between the findings of different research projects demonstrated the importance of suiting research methods to the character of findings and re-emphasized importance of uncovering cases where there are clear, prominent and incontrovertible differences between different textual witnesses – differences that allow a concrete understanding about the form of the Talmud in its early history.

Based on these types of insights, further research will be able to describe the subsequent history of the Talmud with greater certainty. The problem is that most studies failed to uncover substantially variant traditions. In some cases, consistent differences were found between textual witnesses in Eastern Geniza fragments, presenting an alternative family that differed from the more prevalent text appearing in complete witnesses. Occasionally Geniza fragments constituted prominent representatives of one of the branches; but it was not uncommon to find that the Geniza fragments could not be easily placed within the larger textual picture – primarily due of their fragmented state – or else they simply belonged to one of the branches. Nevertheless, over time, variant traditions of the Talmud were uncovered that differed from the prevalent tradition in a manner that was broad, consecutive, and extreme. These traditions were mainly discovered in fragments from the Cairo Geniza, written in Eastern script. I will review, below, the main traditions studied.

A. Segal's doctoral dissertation on the text-traditions of Tractate *Megilla* of the Babylonian Talmud, submitted in 1982 (57), discusses a Geniza copy that "preserves many ancient formulations, perhaps from an alternative version of the tractate." Segal, however, limits himself to a preliminary description of this copy without subjecting it to substantive research. The pages that survived from this copy include texts from the chapter *Helek* of *Sanhedrin*, the first chapter of *Megilla*, and, presumably, the third chapter of *Megilla*. Since some of the surviving pages included material from *Sanhedrin*, they were commented upon by Mordechai Sabato in his own dissertation on a "Yemenite Manuscript of Tractate Sanhedrin (Babylonian Talmud) and its Place in the Text Tradition" (53). In his description of the collection, Sabato quotes Segal's conclusions regarding the characteristics of the text, claiming that Segal's approach "describes well the text of Tractate *Sanhedrin*." Sabato also does not dedicate research to the study of text of this copy. Most recently this text was examined by S. Efrati in the context of the research project "Unknown Traditions of the Babylonian Talmud That Were Preserved in the Cairo Geniza." He discovered that this copy contains substantial variants with a variety of characteristics. His research on this copy has been submitted for publication, and should appear in the near future.

Two articles that present a unique tradition of a Geniza copy were published by O. Shremer (102, 103) in the early 1990s. This copy contains eight pages from the first chapter of Tractate *Mo'ed Katan*. Shremer shows that throughout this copy we find extensive variations that "are not limited to the text, its terminology and formulation, but include additions and subtractions of statements made by the sages of the Talmud, and, occasionally, alternative organization of the material." Shremer presents the text of the entire fragment, contrasting it with the prevalent texts. He deals with the major differences between them, dividing them according to characteristic: the redaction reflected in the fragment, differences in style and text (the unique text of the Mishna, differences in the sources of the *tana'im* and *amora'im*, etc.), and differences in terminology. In his conclusion, Shremer points out the exceptional nature of this finding, claiming that "it appears that we can no longer claim that the source of textual differences lies in textual fluidity and liberties taken by the transmitters of the tradition over the generations." At the same time, Shremer also draws attention to the great similarity that prevails between the different traditions, a fact that leads him to the conclusion that "the boundaries between the different stages of the work’s formation and the significant differences between them are becoming increasingly blurred."

In my study on a single *sugya* from this copy (93), I sought to uncover the source of the extreme variations in that *sugya*, and I claimed that they shared a common basic foundation, even in places where this was not evident. Basing my argument on a comparison between traditions in this *sugya*, I pointed to the possibility that both traditions stemmed from a single, ancient *sugya* some of its component parts having been incorporated integrally, alluded to, or left to the side. I concluded that it was the form of this ancient *sugya* that lead to the development of multiple traditions.

In 1994, Y. Epstein published a unique and prominent find (14): a Geniza copy containing a significant part of the third chapter of Tractate *Sukka*. In the middle of the chapter – in the *sugyot* that deal with the disqualifications of the *etrog* –appear texts that are so substantially different, that they seem to be remnants of *sugyot* from an alternative Talmud. It should be emphasized, that the substantial variants are concentrated in *sugyot* that deal with the disqualifications of the *etrog*; other discrepancies that appear in this copy are significant when compared with prevalent textual families of the prevalent tradition (see Shustri, no. 98). That being said, they are not substantial, and it is clear that the copy belongs to the prevailing tradition. It is also important to note that some other manuscripts share the variants appearing in the Geniza fragment, in particular, the Ashkenazic MS London. In his review of the finding, Epstein notes that a central feature is "the absence of two *sugyot* that stem from the teachings of Palestinian sages," leading him to suggest the possibility that material from the Land of Israel did not reach every place equally. It is possible that the absence of amoraic material led to the differences between these two versions of the Talmud."

Rabin Shustri submitted his doctoral dissertation (97) in 2009 on the topic of "Text Traditions of Tractate *Sukka* in the Babylonian Talmud," which, among other things, discusses this unique finding. Shustri re-examines this finding, and he concludes: "It appears…that this is an example of a variants deriving from an alternative edition. Nevertheless, this conclusion cannot be made definitively…. It may be necessary to review again the reasoning that is brought in the Geniza. It appears to me that the reasoning that is quoted is late and is not original to the *sugya*." In an article that appeared three years later (98), Shustri added a tempered reservation in writing: "This explanation notwithstanding, we must admit that this variant goes beyond those usually found in the Babylonian Talmud, and so we remain in a situation of doubt."

In 2004 I completed my doctoral dissertation on traditions of Tractate *Keritot* (92). In one of the chapters I presented a tradition that survived in the Cairo Geniza in an Eastern fragment that was notably different than the prevalent tradition. This tradition contained many and variegated fluid variations, including some that were substantially different: variations in the way various components of the *sugya* are integrated, as well as variations in which completely different components where integrated into each tradition. At the same time, the detailed structure of the *sugya* was the same in both cases, and the vast majority of the components were similar, as well. I argued that the full picture of the text allows us to reach an educated conclusion in identifying an early stage in the history of the transmission of the *sugyot*. The shared structure of the *sugyot* in both traditions teaches that a single, ancient *sugya* was available to both traditions. Neither the language of the ancient *sugya*, nor even its component parts, had been standardized. The variants between the two traditions teach us that in certain cases the ancient *sugya* contained just "instructions" for the inclusion un-standardized components, and in some cases, certain components of the *sugya* were left on the side as potential raw material. In some cases the differences between the traditions allow us to see how each of the two traditions "followed" the "instructions" of the *sugya* differently, using different methods to incorporate “raw material”, or by using different methods to "follow" “instructions,” which could be interpreted in more than one way.

In 2013, Shamma Friedman published his research findings on a four page Geniza document (74) that contained evident variants from the last two chapters of Tractate *Shabbat*. Friedman reviews a number of types of variants, and focuses on the text of three rabbinic stories contained in a single *sugya*. In the conclusion of his article, Friedman writes: "There is no doubt that the variants that we have seen are larger and more essential than variant readings found in other texts." In evaluating this finding, Friedman uses an approach which concords with his findings in other tractates. He believes that the differences in this copy attest to the fact that "there exists an unknown textual branch in Tractate *Shabbat*, a conservative branch, which, as opposed to the prevalent text, usually preserves the original.

A number of online projects have been established in the past two decades that make research study on the text of the Babylonian Talmud and on Geniza fragments of the Babylonian Talmud more accessible:

1. The FJMS Portal for Jewish Manuscripts and Books Projects. This joint initiative of the "Friedberg Geniza Project" (FGP) and the "Friedberg Jewish Manuscripts Society" (FJMS) encompasses six websites. These websites include: high quality images, copies, synopses, and sophisticated tools and information on the vast majority of Geniza fragments of the Babylonian Talmud. Images and copies of all of the textual witnesses of the Babylonian Talmud will be uploaded to one of the websites – "The Friedberg Project for Babylonian Talmud variants: Hachi Garsinan" – in the near future.

2. The Sol and Evelyn Henkind Talmud Text Databank. This is a project of the Saul Lieberman Institute for Talmudic Research of the Jewish Theological Institute of America that includes copies of all complete manuscripts of the Babylonian Talmud together with many Talmud fragments from the Cairo Geniza and European fragments. It offers search functions and includes a limited number of images.

3. The Online Treasury of Talmudic Manuscripts. This is a joint project of the Hebrew University Department of Talmud and the Jewish National and University Library that includes images of major Talmudic manuscripts – Mishna, Tosefta and Babylonian Talmud – from libraries throughout the world.

**B. Research objectives and the importance of this study**

Research objectives:

1. Expanding findings – Uncovering additional traditions of the Babylonian Talmud represented in Geniza fragments that are substantially different from the tradition prevalent in other textual witnesses.

2. A summary of the phenomena which characterize of these exceptional traditions and their implications.

3. A preliminary description of the conclusions gleaned from studies of the traditions to the history of the Babylonian Talmud from its late redaction stage to the beginning of its transmission.

The importance of the research:

The most significant findings in the study of direct textual witnesses of the Babylonian Talmud have been found in the remnants of copies in the Cairo Geniza, which represent unknown traditions of the Talmud. Until recently only a small number of traditions of this kind have been found. It is difficult to exaggerate the importance of uncovering other traditions and describing the characteristics and significance of the discrepancies between them, both for themselves and in order to describe and understand the history of the Talmud.

**C. A detailed description of the proposed research**

1. The working hypothesis

The most valuable and significant source for clarifying the development of the text of the Babylonian Talmud at the beginning of its transmission is the comparison between traditions with especially substantial variants. Studies conducted up to this point have shown the Cairo Geniza to be the main source of traditions of this kind. Traditions discovered so far, together with the findings and conclusions of the proposed study, will constitute a considerable portion of the exceptional traditions of the Babylonian Talmud preserved in the Cairo Geniza. In any event, a substantial amount of traditions will allow a significant assessment of the ancient traditions of the Babylonian Talmud, together with an initial, research-based description of the history of the Babylonian Talmud in its late redaction stage and at the beginning of its transmission.

2a. The research program

The study will be carried out using two approaches (some overlapping):

**I. Traditions preserved in Geniza copies**

A. Traditions studied up to this point

This phase will be carried out by the principal researcher, assisted by an advanced student in the first year. Three chapters will be written during this phase, describing the traditions that have been researched in the first chapter of *Mo'ed Katan*, the first chapter of *Keritot* and the fifth chapter of *Bava Batra*. The three traditions that have been chosen represent particularly notable phenomena, but each tradition contains its own unique aspect. The first one has already been published, the second was included in my doctoral dissertation, and the third was included in the previous project ("Unknown Traditions of the Babylonian Talmud Preserved in the Cairo Geniza"), but has not yet been published. The findings reported in these three chapters will be revisited and revised in the fourth year, based upon the findings and conclusions of the current research project.

B. Research on the text of Geniza copies that have yet to be studied

This research will be carried out in parallel with stages I A, II A-C by advanced students with the guidance of the principal researcher.

The study will be conducted in two stages:

1. Years 1-2 – A preliminary study of the texts of about twenty Geniza copies that have yet to be studied. The methodology used to research these copies has been formulated in such a way that it will be possible to detect phenomena, increase familiarity and offer research-based conclusions even on fragments not subjected to complete study. Significant findings and conclusions will be included in the chapters that describe the overall phenomena of the traditions (II B, D, E). During this phase, a comprehensive list will be developed describing the phenomena and characteristics found in each copy. This will include, a summary of the phenomena found in each of the fragments studied, including an evaluation of the likelihood that the fragment represents an alternative tradition of the Talmud.

2. Year three – A full study of three or four Geniza copies, chosen from among the copies that were studied in the first stage (I B1) that show the most notable phenomena. Depending on the results of the study, a decision will be made whether to dedicate a separate chapter in the book to one or more of these copies.

Year four - Notable results of the research on copies that will not merit a chapter in the book will be included the chapters that describe the phenomena across all of the traditions (II B, D, E). In addition, articles will be prepared describing in detail the research on those copies. These articles will be written by advanced students who participated in the research. Some of the articles (whose researches will be involved in editing stages II E, D) may be written after the end of the research period.

**II. The phenomena found in all of the copies and their significance**

The research will be carried out by the principal researcher with the assistance of advanced students over the course of three years, from the beginning of the second year (the length of each stage is detailed in the time-line).

A. Comparison and evaluation of the findings, including the conclusions regarding copies that were previously studied by others and by the principal researcher (including the previous research project), compiling a list of phenomena that were found in these copies and preparation a draft of a chapter describing and summarizing notable findings and updated conclusions derived from the study of these copies.

B. Writing a chapter that will include a detailed list of the variants and the phenomena that characterize the differences between traditions, including illustrative examples.

C. Writing an introduction to the book that includes a review of research, explanations of the methods used and clarification of the structure of the book.

D. A comparison and evaluation of the findings and conclusions of **all the copies.** An update of the draft chapter that was written in stage II A, which will likely be divided into two or three chapters (because of the large number of copies and variety of phenomena). The research will first focus on those copies that were studied in stage I 1B (and were not included in stage I 2B). With the conclusion of the full study of the copies that were included in stage I 2B of the research, the study will be expanded to all of the copies. If necessary, those chapters that describe traditions that were studied earlier (A I) will be updated. If a decision is made to devote a chapter in the book to one of the copies that was included in stage I 2B, it will be written at this stage.

E. Writing a chapter that will present the research findings on the traditions that shed light on the history of the Babylonian Talmud.

2b. Research methods

**A reevaluation of previously studied copies –**

Reconsideration of *sugyot* included in fragments already studied and their texts, in comparison with the texts of all the other witnesses, in the light of the overall findings and conclusions that were reached based on research of the traditions; characterization and systematic recording of the phenomena that were found; a summary of the findings and the conclusions reached from the study of every copy, and an examination of their significance for understanding the history of the Babylonian Talmud.

**Research of previously un-studied fragments –**

This part of the research will be carried out in two stages.

In the first stage, we will carry out a preliminary study of the text of about twenty Geniza fragments that likely contain an alternative tradition of the Talmud. The chosen fragments will be those that present the most unique phenomena from among the 350 fragments which although examined in the second stage of the project "Unknown Traditions of the Babylonian Talmud Preserved in the Cairo Geniza" were not studied. This stage will be carried out by three advanced research students under my supervision. This study will take about two years, with an average of about four months devoted to each fragment. At this stage the research will include: A comparative study of all the textual witnesses of the *sugyot* included in that fragment, studying each of the *sugyot* based on their variant texts, recording the variants and their characteristics, and providing a general assessment of the fragment text in comparison with the other witnesses and the likelihood that the fragment represents an alternative tradition. This stage of research has two goals: 1. Identification of exceptional traditions, and 2. Identification of substantial variants and exceptional phenomena even in fragments where it is difficult to detect a continuous alternative tradition.

Findings that can serve as clear examples of a certain variant or phenomenon will be included in the chapter that contains the list of phenomena (II B). Significant findings will be addressed in the chapters that describe the phenomena that were discovered (II D) and in the concluding chapter (II E).

In the second stage we will carry out a full study of three or four fragments selected all the fragments studied in the previous stage. The fragments that will be chosen will be those that represent the most substantial phenomena and that appear to be most likely to represent an alternative tradition. A full study on the text of the chapter will be carried out together with characterization of the variants, including a careful examination of the *sugyot* as they appear in all of the textual witnesses and in the Geniza copy. This will consist of a wide range of different perspectives, for example: language, content, how the *sugya* was formed and redacted, comparison to parallels in rabbinic literature and elsewhere, discussion of traditional commentary and scholarly research. Additional aspects will be assessed according to the findings in each *sugya*. When the conclusions on each of the copies are summarized, we will analyze the significance of the findings in terms of characterizing traditions studying the history of the Talmud. This will include reference to the conclusions in our study of traditions.

**Phenomena found in all the traditions and their significance**

As noted, the research on all of the copies – both those that will be reexamined and those to be studied for the first time in the context of the proposed project – will be carried out in the context of the findings and conclusions from studies done on the other traditions. In addition, after completion of the chapters describing the traditions that have already been studied (stage I A), I will focus on comparing and evaluating the findings and conclusions relating to all of the copies – beginning with copies that have already been studied (including those studied in the previous project) that are being reevaluated (II A), and continuing with completion of research on the copies that have not yet been studied (I 2B). This study will serve as the basis of two or three chapters that will describe the notable findings on the copies that will not be described in the chapters that focus on specific copies. Those chapters will deal with phenomena that appear throughout all of the copies and their significance (II D). Similarly it will serve as the basis for reaching conclusions about the history of the Babylonian Talmud based on the research of the traditions (II E).

When we finish comparing the conclusions related to copies that have already been researched (II A), and concurrent with the completion of the preliminary research on twenty Geniza fragments, we will spend about six months writing a chapter that will present a detailed list of the different types of variants and phenomena that characterize the variations between traditions (II B). Every item in the detailed list will include a description of its nature, together with a number of clear examples. It will also include a short discussion that will clarify the phenomenon or variant. This detailed list will serve as a basis for clarifying the research method that was used in this project, and it will be used as a basic tool for continued research on the early traditions of the Babylonian Talmud.

At the end, based on all of the research that has been completed on the notable traditions of the Babylonian Talmud – including those from the current project – I will write a chapter describing the inferences that can be derived from the research regarding the history of the Babylonian Talmud in its redaction and at the beginning of its transmission.

3. Prior results

As mentioned above, the proposed research project follows an earlier project "Unknown Traditions of the Babylonian Talmud Preserved in the Cairo Geniza," which significantly expanded the number of unique traditions that survived as Geniza fragments to have been studied, and provided the foundation that enabled the current study. Results of the previous project results were enumerated in the Scientific Background section as well as in the project summary attached to this application.

4. The resources at my disposal to carry out the study

Resources:

* The Institute of Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts – is the largest database of images of Hebrew manuscripts. It includes films and photostats of fragments of the Babylonian Talmud that appear in no other place (aside from the library where the original is located).
* The Treasury of Talmudic Manuscripts – is a comprehensive catalogue of textual witnesses of all Talmudic compositions.
* The Online Treasury of Talmudic Manuscripts – is a website that contains images of a selection of manuscripts of Mishna, Tosefta and the Babylonian Talmud.
* The FJMS Portal for Jewish Manuscripts and Books Projects – this web portal includes high quality images, copies, synopses, together with sophisticated tools and information on the vast majority of Geniza fragments of the Babylonian Talmud. Images and copies of all of the textual witnesses of the Babylonian Talmud will be uploaded to one of the websites – which focuses on the text of the Babylonian Talmud – in the near future.
* Talmud Text Database – includes copies of all complete manuscripts of the Babylonian Talmud together with many Talmud fragments from the Cairo Geniza and European fragments. It offers search functions and includes a limited number of images.
* Scholarly editions of chapters and tractates that include details of textual variants or comparisons (synopses) of all of the textual witnesses. A list of these works is included in the Bibliography.

Human Resources:

Graduate students and distinguished research students studying in Faculty of Talmud at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

5. Anticipated Outcomes

This research study will culminate with a book that will include a comprehensive description of the notable phenomena that have been discovered up to this point in the textual witnesses of the Babylonian Talmud. It will consider their significance in understanding the history of the Babylonian Talmud and will pave the way for further research in this field. We expect the book to consist of an introduction and between seven and nine chapters, as follows:

Three or four chapters will describe the traditions that were found to contain notable phenomena;

Two or three chapters will describe the significant findings in the study of those copies that were not discussed in the previous chapters and will discuss the phenomena that appeared in all the copies and their significance (II D);

One chapter will present a list of the different types of variants that characterize the differences between traditions offering examples;

One chapter that will suggest research-based conclusions regarding the history of the Babylonian Talmud.

One additional expected outcome – Publication of the research of a number of traditions that were fully studied in the context of this project but have not been included in one of the chapters of the book. It is likely that some of these traditions will be published only after the completion of this project.

**Scientific abstract**

Background – Studies on the text of the Babylonian Talmud, conducted over the past few decades, have uncovered a number of Geniza fragments that present traditions of the Talmud that are substantially different than the prevalent text that appears in the other textual witnesses. The remnants of these traditions demonstrate a high degree of textual fluidity in the transmission of these texts and reveal a wealth of textual phenomena that ordinarily are not represented in the complete textual witnesses. The problem is that the findings that have been published up to this point are insufficient to offer a serious summary of the phenomena; certainly they offer no basis for a serious description of the conclusions about the history of the Talmud based on the study of different traditions. Five years ago I initiated a research project whose goal was to identify unknown traditions of the Babylonian Talmud and study them in a systematic way. The research was conducted with the assistance of the Israel Science Foundation (No. 1263/11). Over the course of the study, we reviewed approximately 360 Geniza fragments that contained significant variants in comparison with the prevalent text. Once the review was completed, we chose seven copies from seven different chapters that represented the most wide-ranging and notable phenomena. These copies were subjected to a systematic and comprehensive analysis. The traditions that were studied exhibited rich and notable phenomena, including some that have not been described in any research up to this point. The research significantly expanded the pool of exceptional traditions that have been studied and significantly contributed to understanding the early composition of the *sugyot* and to the study of the history of the *sugyot* at the end of the period of their redaction and the beginning of their transmission.

Goals of the Proposed Research:

1. Expanding findings – Uncovering additional traditions of the Babylonian Talmud represented in Geniza fragments that are substantially different from the tradition prevalent in other textual witnesses.

2. A summary of the phenomena which characterize of these exceptional traditions and their implications.

3. A preliminary description of the conclusions gleaned from studies of the traditions to the history of the Babylonian Talmud from its late redaction stage to the beginning of its transmission.

A short description of the research:

The research will be conducted on two parallel tracks:

1. Researching the traditions. Traditions that have already been studied will be reexamined in the light of up-to-date results of research, together with Geniza copies that have not been studied in the past. First, preliminary research will be conducted on about twenty Geniza fragments which, in the previous study, were found to contain notable phenomena. At the end of this phase a number of fragments that represent the most significant phenomena will be chosen, and they will be fully researched.

2. Phenomena in all the copies and their significance. A list of variants and phenomena that characterize the differences between traditions will be prepared. A summary of the notable findings in all of the traditions will be prepared, together with a comparison and evaluation of the findings and conclusions in all the traditions. Based on all of the findings and conclusions, a study will be carried out whose purpose is to present the conclusions of the research on the traditions, describing the history of the Babylonian Talmud.

Anticipated outcome:

This research study will culminate in the writing of a book that will include a comprehensive description of the notable phenomena that have been discovered up to this point in the textual witnesses of the Babylonian Talmud. It will consider their significance in understanding the history of the Babylonian Talmud and will pave the way for further research in this field. The book will include an introduction, three or four chapters describing the traditions that were found to contain notable phenomena, two or three chapters that will describe the phenomena that appeared in all the copies and their significance, one chapter that will present a list of the different types of variants that characterize the differences between traditions and will offer examples of them, and one chapter that will suggest research-based conclusions regarding the history of the Babylonian Talmud.

**Summary of most recent grant**

**Research title: Unknown Traditions of the Babylonian Talmud Preserved in the Cairo Geniza**

**Research Goals**

Identification of unknown traditions of the Babylonian Talmud preserved in the Cairo Geniza, characterization of the traditions that were found and clarification of the phenomena found in them and their significance for the study of the Babylonian Talmud, particularly in its early stages.

**Research achievements**

**Stage I –** A list of about 360 Geniza fragments, about 15% of all of the Geniza fragments of the Babylonian Talmud, which provided suggestions or preliminary indications of representing an alternative tradition of the Talmud. The fragments were chosen mainly based on tests that were performed when the Thesaurus of Talmudic Manuscripts was being prepared, in addition to lists developed in my research and bibliographic examinations.

**Stage II** – A review of all the fragments chosen in the first stage compared with the printed text. A detailed list was prepared for each fragment containing the significant variants that were found, a preliminary characterization of the variants in the fragment and an evaluation of the likelihood that the fragment represents an alternative tradition. Those fragments with the highest rating were subjected to a comprehensive evaluation in the context of the third stage.

The review performed in the second stage was adapted specifically to serve as a preliminary step to the third stage, and neither it nor its findings should be construed as a study that stands on its own merit. Nevertheless, a number of the conclusions of the second stage are significant and should be noted: (1) No fragments were found that represent an alternative Talmud. (2) The number of fragments that might represent an alternative redaction process is very small. (3) The substantial differences found in many of the fragments were characterized diverse types of fluid variants. Aside from these preliminary impressions, the importance of the second stage lies in establishing a preliminary framework for a comprehensive evaluation of the history of the traditions of the Babylonian Talmud, as evidenced by the Geniza fragments.

**Stage III** – From among the list of fragments that were reviewed in the second stage, seven Geniza copies from seven chapters of the Talmud were chosen, which represented the richest and most notable phenomenon. The traditions of these chapters were studied thoroughly and systematically – the sixth chapter of Tractate *Berakhot*, the sixteenth chapter of *Shabbat* (including a partial study of chapter fifteen), the first chapter of *Megilla*, the thirteenth chapter of *Ketubot*, the fifth chapter of *Bava Batra*, the eleventh chapter of *Sanhedrin* (Chapter *Helek*), and the eight chapter of *Shavu'ot*. Five of the studies of the out-of-the-ordinary copies have been completed and the notable conclusions have been published or submitted for publication. The study on one chapter (chapter six of *Berakhot*) is almost complete and the study on one additional chapter (chapter five of *Bava Batra*) is in an advanced stage of work.

All of the traditions studied displayed variants that were numerous, diverse and significant – some of them substantial – in comparison with the prevalent tradition. The conclusions that emerged regarding the history of the traditions were of particular importance. The careful comparisons made between the traditions teaches of the great fluidity of the Talmudic text, and on more than one occasion allowed us to reconstruct the early form of *sugyot* at a stage prior to the bifurcation of the *sugyot*. This led to the conclusion that the different traditions were established in the early stages of the transmission of the Babylonian Talmud, and in one case, even at a late redaction stage. Together with these general conclusions, a number of notable phenomena emerged that were unique to specific traditions, some of which were very rare, some of which have never been described in the research. Study of the traditions also made a decisive contribution to understanding the larger textual picture in all of the chapters that were studied, including those chapters where the picture of the text is especially complex. In addition, the research contributed significant improvement to the understanding of the texts themselves, their content, language and interpretation.

This concise summary does not allow me to enumerate the contributions made by the research on the texts that were studied – that must be left to detailed publications. But I will offer a succinct review of the findings and significant conclusions that emerged from a number of the chapters that were studied:

A tradition that was discovered in the sixteenth chapter of *Shabbat* included exceptional variations in the locations of texts, characterized as redactionary variants. It appears that these phenomena teach that the traditions separated at a very early stage – at "the end of redaction" – when some amora'itic material that had not been incorporated into the Talmud was still extant, yet the main body of the *sugya* had already been arranged and redacted. At this point additional amora'itic sections were added, and different traditions inserted them in different places in the *sugya*. In some instances one tradition may have added material that does not appear in the other traditions at all.

We also find a considerable variation in placement of an entire section in the Geniza tradition in the thirteenth chapter of *Ketubot*. Recognition of a section whose placement changes as a "satellite section" – that is recognized by its movement from place to place – contributes to a new understanding of the purpose of the entire *sugya* and of the satellite section specifically. This has far-ranging implications, including programmatic implications, which relate to the status of the Babylonian center and attempts to solidify the legitimacy of its very existence.

Geniza copies of the eighth chapter of *Shavu'ot* suggest the possibility of a Babylonian tradition that contained just two *mishnayot* in the chapter and did not include the entire eighth chapter.

The unique Geniza copy of the fifth chapter of *Bava Batra* presents many diverse and significant variants, including: Changes in the order of the *sugyot*, changes in content, changes in source material, missing sections, etc. Together with those we also find many significant corruptions. In the course of research, it became apparent that the tradition found in this copy could be best clarified by means of studying corrupted text. The errors are exceptional, characterized by variants with fluid discourse. By means of these unique corruptions, it is possible to discern the contours of the text reflected in this copy, and occasionally we can identify the likely details of the text. These unique corruptions along with the variants in this copy, together represent an alternative tradition of the Talmud, different from the one with which we are familiar. A careful comparison of the traditions teaches us of the great fluidity at the time when the traditions were being established and it allows us to suggest a well-founded proposition of the form taken by the *sugyot* in the early Talmud that served as the basis of each of these traditions. In one instance it appears likely that this Geniza copy represents a remnant of that early Talmud.

In conclusion, the research project broadened the collection of exceptional traditions of the Babylonian Talmud that have been studied, and presented a list of additional copies designated for future research. The conclusions of the research offered a significant contribution to the study of the early traditions of the Babylonian Talmud and to the study of the history of the Babylonian Talmud at the end of the period of its redaction and at the beginning of its transmission.

**Publications stemming from the research**