**Duplication and Creation in Amoraic Literary Work**

A basic, well-known characteristic of the Babylonian Talmud is its tendency to duplicate language. This recycling extends from the reuse of words and short phrases to the repetition of long and complex sugyot (Talmudic discussions) in different contexts. In most cases, duplication manifests in the appearance of similar textual units in different contexts, sometimes either shortened or drawn out, and in some cases with specific modifications to the changed location. In this lecture, I will discuss another type of textual duplication in the Bavli—in units of halakhic deliberation where most of the dialectic is formulated identically, but the topic or sources discussed are different in content or details. This difference is reflected in several places within a uniform textual sequence, which includes components that function in the same way, but whose contents change according to the specific topic of each unit. The parallel between these units is seen, on the one hand, in the content and formulation of the duplicated components, and on the other, in the logical function of the changed components. It is important to emphasize that the duplicated dialectical passages I discuss here are not abstract logical structures that can be suited to many sugyot, but rather consolidated and detailed passages that are firmly ingrained in their context. It is for this reason that each of the dialectical units I discuss here is duplicated only over a few stages of the discussion, usually two or three.

In my research, I have gathered several dozen examples of units with parallel dialectical passages. Some appear one after the other, in one textual sequence, where sometimes one is marked as the alternative of the other by various phrases such as איכא דמתני or איכא דאמרי (‘there are some who teach’ or ‘there are some who say’), and some appear in distant locations—sometimes even in different chapters, tractates, or orders.

In most cases, the duplication of a repeated passage is the work of an anonymous editor who cannot be dated, but in a few cases, there are convincing indications that the person responsible for the repeated use of the fixed passage is actually a named Amora. These examples are especially important for understanding the historical context of the phenomenon and its features. In this lecture, I will focus on the occurrence of the phenomenon of duplicated passages during the Amoraic era and on the significance of these occurrences. I will do so based on a short survey of two relevant examples, where I will attempt to define and more clearly demonstrate the key characteristics of the phenomenon in general.

To keep my lecture short, I will present the sugyot in a general and preliminary way, and not delve deeply into their contents. To present this special type of structural similarity between parallel textual units I kept to the original language and did not translate the sources into English. To clarify the relationship between the various units, I divided the duplicated passages into stages and marked their fixed elements in various colors to set apart the components that change from unit to unit.

* Yevamot/Zevahim/Hullin/Temurah/Gittin:

My first example of such a duplicated passage appears in five sugyot scattered throughout the Talmud (Yevamot, Zevahim, Hullin, Temurah, and Gittin), each dealing with a completely different subject. All of them share a common structural element: they include an Amoraic exchange where one speaker presents a problem originating in the Land of Israel, and his interlocutor suggests switching it with a different problem. There are additional points of similarity in the structure of the sugyot and their language, where some of them are more similar to each other than others. Each of these sugyot has two versions, and the second version always appears following the phrase רב נחמן בר יצחק מתני הכי (Rabbi Nahman bar Yitzhak teaches thus). In all of the cases, Rabbi Nahman bar Yitzhak’s alternative suggestion consists of a switch between the original problem and the one suggested in its place, that is—he switches the order of the arguments in each of the sugyot and attributes them alternatively to different speakers.

As can be seen in the charts in the presentation, all of Rabbi Nahman bar Yitzhak’s alternate suggestions are very similar in their structure and language to the suggestions that preceded them. (All of the similar elements are marked in black. The components whose content changes from suggestion to suggestion, even though the function they fulfill within the passage is the same, are marked in red. Elements that appear in only one suggestion and have no parallel in the second suggestion are marked in gray).

It seems that Rabbi Nahman bar Yitzhak systematically performed textual criticism in five sugyot with similar characteristics—sugyot that he perhaps had received as a collection, or perhaps collected himself. His textual criticism entailed switching the order of elements of the sugyot before him while adding content modifications as needed—perhaps based on original traditions he had which did not suit the versions of these sugyot. In any case, we should note that in doing so he made sure to maintain the basic form of the dialectic.

This consistency throughout the suggestions switched by Rabbi Nahman bar Yitzhak is broken in one case—in Hullin—where several elements from the original suggestion appear to be missing in his alternate suggestion. But actually—there are several reasons to doubt the originality of the contents of the first suggestion, and it may be that they were added after Rabbi Nahman bar Yitzhak’s time. In the sugya in Gittin, there is an additional change in the order of arguments in the two suggestions—beyond the basic switch that characterizes his suggestions in the other sugyot (as can be seen in the components marked in gray). This change in order is very significant because it reveals to us that in this case, Rabbi Nahman bar Yitzhak did not determine the literary structure of his suggestion according to the passage of the sugya he sought to replace, but rather according to the duplicated passage in the other parallel units!

It seems that Rabbi Nahman bar Yitzhak intentionally imposed consistency in all of the sugyot where he made the alternate suggestion. Why? It may have been for the sake of easier transmission, or perhaps he saw the structural fixity of several of the units before him as indicating the originality of the passage and drew on their uniform structure to enhance his efforts at reconstruction and accuracy.

In any case, we see that Rabbi Nahman bar Yitzhak, a fifth-generation Amora, already ascribed importance to the structure of the sugyot before him and to their language, and he drew on these to offer alternative Talmudic suggestions. This demonstrates that the phenomenon of the duplication of parallel dialectical passages should not be attributed to the latest generations who edited the Talmud. Rather, this example indicates that activity of study, organization, and transmission occurred already (at the latest) among the fifth generation of Babylonian Amoraim.

* Yevamot/Bava Batra/Niddah

This second example is perhaps the most remarkable in demonstrating the reuse of a fixed dialectical passage, and certainly the most remarkable example of such activity by a named Amora.

The passage repeats in three sugyot in three different tractates, dealing with varied topics (the laws of the firstborn, the laws of Levirate marriage, and the problem of the collection of a ketubah). At the heart of the three textual units are Tannaitic sources with halakhic rulings based on uncertainty that cannot be resolved, and in each of the units these rulings prompt the following challenge : (A)לימא הלך אחר רוב , that is—why don’t they resolve the uncertainty and decide according to the most common situation? The parallel passage then includes a resolution (B), a refutation of the resolution (C), and its correction (D).

Each of the units defines the common and uncommon situations in question differently, and there are other differences in the details of the arguments (marked in red)—corresponding to the different topics. The units in Yevamot and Niddah are similar to each other in dealing with “birthing mothers” (marked in blue) and are distinguished from the third unit in Bava Batra/Ketubbot that deals with “marrying women.” The units in Yevamot and Bava Batra/Ketubbot share the concern with women (marked in purple) in contrast with the unit in Niddah that deals with cattle.

In the Yevamot sugya, the challenge in step (A) is attributed to Rava (fourth generation), and Rav Nahman (third generation) resolves it. Rava challenges the resolution (in the section marked in gray) and Rav Nahman reformulates it in a lengthier and clearer way (at stage B). By contrast, in the other two sugyot, the challenge raised in stage A is anonymous, and Ravina is the one to resolve it in stage B—based on the same passage attributed in Yevamot to Rav Nahman. This Ravina is most likely a sage of the fifth generation—Rava’s student who participates in the sugya in Yevamot (and not the seventh-generation sage with the same name), since he is found in a series of other sugyot dealing with the principle of deciding according to the most common scenario.

The dating of the sages who participate in the unit in Yevamot seems to indicate that it is early compared to the other units, and its expanded Amoraic exchange that includes stages A-B of the parallel dialectical passage demonstrates that this passage emerged from the specific context of Yevamot and that it is secondary to the other sugyot. The similarity between the Yevamot unit and the other two units, as opposed to the differences between the Niddah and Bava Batra/Ketubot sugyot, also points to the primacy of the passage in Yevamot and its duplication in various ways, while maintaining certain content elements and changing others to correspond to the different topics of discussion in the other two units. Based on this data it may be that Ravina—to whom the resolution from stage B in Niddah and Bava Batra/Ketubot is attributed, had received the formulation of his predecessor, Rav Nahman, in which he responded to a certain challenge regarding the mishnah in Yevamot. Ravina duplicated the dialectical passage (removing the stages of the exchange specifically connected to the original context) to create new resolutions to similar challenges that came up in two additional contexts.

The similarity of the passage in the three sugyot continues in stages C-D, in which the resolution from stage B is corrected following a challenge regarding the way it is formulated. The nature of the relationship between the three sugyot in these two stages requires more study than we have time for today, but it may be that Ravina had also received these two stages of the discussion, and if so—his duplication work was even broader, and he transferred an entire sugya passage that was formed in Yevamot and modified it to the two additional contexts.

\*

In conclusion, in the two examples we have reviewed briefly we saw fifth-generation Amoraim suggesting their teachings based on a fixed and formulated dialectical passage they had received. In the first example, Rabbi Nahman bar Yitzhak drew on the fixed passage he had received to achieve accuracy and reconstruct the original version of the sugyot he discussed. Moreover—he reused one passage to create a basic textual uniformity between all of the sugyot that came before him. In the second example, we saw how Ravina acted creatively to produce new textual units by using an existing logical and linguistic outline and reapplying it to additional contexts sharing a common conceptual core.

In most of the examples I encounter in my research, this work of duplication is not attributed to a specific sage, and it may be that it occurred at the latest stages of the editing of Talmudic sugyot. The examples I presented to you today seem to depict a technique for the organization, editing, and creation of sugyot that was used already during the Amoraic era, which, accordingly, cannot then be dated to the very last stages of the Bavli’s editing.