

ABSTRACT

THE TALMUDIC *STAM* AS AN EVOLUTIONARY PHENOMENON:  
THE OPENING *SUGYOT* OF TRACTATE NEDARIM  
IN THE TALMUD YERUSHALMI AND THE TALMUD BAVLI

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Lately, the debate regarding the anonymous components of the Bavli is broadening. According to the predominant approach, one can often reconstruct the history of a given *sugya* through literary analysis, by separating its attributed components from the anonymous ones and positing a chronological gap between the two. Therefore, it is often claimed that the *stam* and its creators – the *Stamma'im* – represent a new culture, which revolutionized the methods of study and the recording of knowledge. This view has been criticized lately, at times through comparative analysis of the Yerushalmi.

This article re-examines the ‘Late-*Stam* Hypothesis’ by comparing the opening *sugyot* of tractate Nedarim in both Talmuds. The Babylonian *sugya* has many of the characteristics of assumed late anonymous *sugyot* and is quite similar to other opening *sugyot*, usually assumed to be the post-Amoraic. However, this *sugya* shows close affinity to the parallel *sugya* in the Yerushalmi and many of the supposedly late Babylonian characteristics are found there too.

After considering the theoretical possibilities for explaining the relationship between the two *sugyot*, the article argues that the supposedly late Babylonian *sugya* is better understood as the fruit of an evolutionary process, rather than a late Babylonian novelty. It seems quite likely that some of the supposedly late traits of the Babylonian *sugya* were inherited from an earlier, probably Palestinian *sugya*. Through examination of several other *sugyot* in both Talmuds, the article argues that this phenomenon is far from rare. Whereas quite often in Talmudic scholarship the Yerushalmi is adduced to support the chronological divide inside the Bavli, these *sugyot* seem to point to the contrary. Furthermore, many *sugyot* in the Bavli lack parallels in the Yerushalmi, while it is clear that Palestinian (and Babylonian) material was abundant and diverse. Therefore, in the analysis of non-paralleled anonymous material in the Bavli one must consider the possibility that this material originated earlier than usually assumed.