Chapter Seven

The Palestinian Talmud

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Tannaim and Amoraim

The literary formulation and exposition of Oral Tora as expressed in the corpus of Tannaic literature reached culmination in the mid-third century C.E. The final editing of the Mishna, Tosefta and Tannaic midrash collections marked the end of a period. It was followed by two-and-a-half centuries of specialized commentary to the Tannaic corpus: the period of the Talmud. The literal meaning of the word talmud is ‘teaching’, and indeed the talmudic period is marked by intense commentary to, and extended teaching of, all that went before it.

The period of the Talmud is also known as the Amoraic period, after the teachers of this period who are designated Amoraim. This term derives from the verb אמר amar which means ‘to say’. The Amora ‘says’ or ‘explains’, and his teachings are called מMEA memra, ‘saying’. Thus this period is differentiated from the previous period whose teachers do not ‘say’ but ‘teach’ and are called Tannaim (from the Aramaic נה tana, to teach); their teachings are called matnita, ‘teaching’, in Aramaic, or in the Hebrew parallel: mishna. The Tanna ‘teaches’; the Amora ‘says’. The distinction between Tanna and Amora is clearly made in the Talmud itself. Thus Rav Papa refers to ‘two Tannaim or two Amoraim who differ with one another’.

Yet despite these distinctions, the transition from the Tannaic to the Amoraic period is not clearly marked. The first generation of Babylonian Amoraim, for example, resemble in many ways the last generations of Palestinian Tannaim such as R. Hiya and R. Hoshaya, and their teachings are often indicated in the

1 B. T. Sanh. 33a. A more specific use of the title Amora is to be found in B. T. Sanh. 17b, where it seems to indicate teachers of later generations. Thus Rav Huna and Rav Hisda, both of the second generation (250-300 C.E.) are designated סבאי sabai, ‘elders’, of Sura, whereas Rabba and Rav Yosef of the following generation, are called ‘Amoraim of Pumbedita’ and Rav Hama is called ‘Amora of Nehardea’. A third, and very different, meaning of the term Amora is implied in its use to indicate the meturgeman who interprets in loud voice the soft-spoken words of the Sage in the academy or synagogue.
same way as Tannaic traditions. Of the first-century Babylonian Amora Rav it is stated explicitly: 'Rav is a Tanna and may dispute a mishna or baraita.' In other respects too, the Talmud is not just commentary to the Mishna which itself belongs to a clearly different period, but also an extension of the Mishna. In the course of its commentary on the Mishna it brings in almost every relevant Tannaic teaching, whether it be found in the extant Tannaic collections or in baraitot otherwise unknown. Regarding the last category, both Talmudim are very important sources for our knowledge of Tannaic teaching. Furthermore, the prime aim, especially of the Palestinian Talmud, is a further discussion of mishnayot in relation to other Tannaic halakhot, and in doing so it keeps very close to the direct meaning of the Mishna text.

Palestinian and Babylonian Talmud

The Talmud is an extension of Tannaic teaching not only in time, but also in place. Simultaneously, two parallel processes of post-mishnaic teaching began, in Palestine and in Babylonia. While the Palestinian Talmud had its final editing at the end of the fourth century, the Babylonian Talmud was to grow for another century. Both Talmudim contain the edited discussions and halakhic decisions of the Sages of the various academies in Palestine and in Babylonia.

Although the two Talmudim emerged from two independent teaching traditions, these did not remain separate. They drew upon one another and have much material in common. Thus many a completely Babylonian discussion will be included in the Palestinian Talmud, and, to a much greater extent, Palestinian teaching is found in the Babylonian Talmud, albeit often with characteris-

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2 Both Rav and Shmuel, and their schools, teach baraitot which originate with them. Thus we find: 'The matnita (= baraita) of Rav differs with him' (P. T. Ber. 2, 4c); 'Said R. Zeira, it has been taught (= a baraita) in Ketuvot of the school of Rav... ' (P. T. Ket. 2, 26c). The phrase 'Shmuel taught' occurs scores of times (e.g. B. T. Yoma 70a; Sukka 56b). The verb used in this expression, teni in the Palestinian Talmud and tena in the Babylonian, indicates a Tannaic teaching or baraita. Moreover, the very common 'the school of R. Yishmael taught' is very often a corruption of 'the school of Shmuel taught', as Epstein, Nosah, 213 pointed out. On the other hand, late Palestinian Tannaim such as R. Hiya and R. Hoshaya are often indicated as belonging to a 'transition generation'. Albeck, Babli and Yerushalmi, 144-63 even lists them as the first generation of Palestinian Amoraim.

3 E.g. B. T. Er. 3b. This is not said explicitly of Shmuel, but his authority against a mishna or baraita is hardly less.

4 Cf. Frankel, Mavo ha-Yerushalmi, 28b-31a.

5 E.g. the leniencies of Palestinian Amoraim, and of their Babylonian colleagues, regarding work forbidden on intermediate festival days: compare P. T. Moed K. 2, 81b and B. T. Moed K. 12a-b. Again, Rav's exposition of the anonymous position and that of R. Yehuda in M. Er. 1:1, is found in both Talmudim (P. T. Er. 1, 18b; B. T. Er. 2a) and the parallel sugyot have many literary features in common.