


A. S. van der Woude


Kalmin proposes the following (from his book flap): "... in each case where a late Amora appears to respond to statements by the stam, it is possible, and usually preferable in the light of certain incongruities in the sugya as it presently stands, to detach the Amoraic statement from its connection to the stam and restore its original connection to an earlier Amoraic or Tannaitic source. The simplest explanation for this phenomenon ... is that late Amoraim do not respond to the earlier stam.

Journal for the Study of Judaism, Vol. XXI, no. 2
262   REVIEW OF BOOKS

discussions because there were no earlier stamot. Composition of the stam ... did not begin until after the conclusion of the Amoraic period.”

This is simply a fabrication, which emerges when one has made up one’s own definitions, invented one’s own questions, and produced answers in accord with one’s own program. Readers will expect a rather compendious treatment of texts, so that they may share in the inquiry that the author undertakes. Otherwise, how are we to know what it means to “detach the Amoraic statement from its connection to the stam” or to know why that is required at all? But Kalmin favors us only with five “examples”! Here is what he tells us about his untranslated, merely-paraphrased paragraph (Ket. 69a):

According to the sugya as it presently stands, Rav Yemar’s dialogue with Rav Ashi is based on a stam discussion of R. Yohanan’s opinion. According to the stam, the unmarried daughter loses her dowry because once she receives half of the inheritance and is amply provided for, the dowry is no longer necessary. The purpose served by the dowry has been achieved by other means, and the dowry can therefore be dispensed with. It is on this stam interpretation of R. Yohanan that Rav Yemar’s objection appears to be based. There is no reason to assume, however, that Rav Yemar and Rav Ashi could not have arrived at the above interpretation of R. Yohanan (most likely the simple meaning of his statement) without the stam. Rav Yemar could have independently arrived at this interpretation and assumed it as the basis for his objection. Only later, when the stam interpolated material into the sugya, was the impression created that the dialogue between Rav Yemar and Rav Ashi was dependent on the stam.

Now it appears to me that Kalmin has simply imposed upon the passage his own premises and proved his point merely by announcing it. The entire argumentation consists of “there is no reason to assume.” And what we have to assume is that Yemar and Ashi could have arrived at their reading of Yohanan’s statement without the intervening anonymous materials.

How does Kalmin know this, and why does he insist that what they could have done they did do? His proposed deconstruction of the text is all that this argument consists of: it might have been put together in some other way than the way in which we have it, specifically, in the way in which, as a matter of hypothesis, Kalmin thinks it was formed: “only later, when the stam interpolated material into the sugya, was the impression created that the dialogue ... was dependent on the stam.” The other four “examples,” upon which the entire argument of the book rests, are similar exercises in begging the question.

If this is the kind of solipsistic scholarship that the “critica, scientific” school at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America (where Kalmin is a professor of Talmud) and Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion (which published the book) aims at creating, then the rest of us will have to take our leave with no sense of having missed important and