

## The Further Adventures of Rav Kahana

Between Babylonia and Palestine

by

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Recent years have witnessed the examination of the intertextual dimension of biblical literature<sup>1</sup> and rabbinic Midrash.<sup>2</sup> While intertextuality is a quality of all literary texts,<sup>3</sup> its realization in various genres can be vastly different. The following study presents an investigation of intertextuality in the aggadah of the talmudic corpus, within a wide range of narratives about R. Yohanan, Resh Laqish, and Rav Kahana.

Talmudic narratives are usually polished literary compositions, and can be profitably analyzed as closed, independent units.<sup>4</sup> However, it is important to go beyond this approach and adduce the rich, textured relationship which exists among the discreet narratives.<sup>5</sup> Underneath the surface of splendid isolation is a “living and breathing” literary creation that interacts with others through incorporation of small units and transformation of larger ones.

We shall discuss examples where two narratives present different accounts of the same person, ostensibly עובדי עובדי, but in reality an earlier source, and a later reworking.<sup>6</sup> Often a story is radically transformed<sup>7</sup> in order to correct or

<sup>1</sup> M. Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel*, Oxford 1985; Y. Zakovitch, “The Many Faces of Inner-Biblical Interpretation” (Hebrew), *Tarbiz* 56 (1986), pp. 136–143; *ibid.*, *An Introduction to Inner-Biblical Interpretation* (Hebrew), Even-Yehuda 1992; *ibid.*, *Through the Looking Glass, Reflection Stories in the Bible* (Hebrew), Tel Aviv 1995; J.L. Kugel, *The Bible as it Was*, Cambridge 1997, pp. 2–8.

<sup>2</sup> D. Boyarin, *Intertextuality and the Reading of the Midrash*, Bloomington 1990.

<sup>3</sup> See Boyarin, p. 14.

<sup>4</sup> As has been ably done by Jonah Fraenkel, “Hermeneutic Problems in the Study of the Aggadic Narrative” (Hebrew), *Tarbiz*, 47 (1978), pp. 139–172. See J.L. Rubenstein, *Talmudic Stories*, Baltimore 1999, pp. 8–10, and there describing Fraenkel’s approach: “A story exists in a secluded textual space with no allusion or reference to other texts”.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Rubenstein, pp. 243–244, 254–255.

<sup>6</sup> Fishbane made use of the term “aggadic exegesis” in reference to biblical narrative. He writes, “aggadic exegesis in the historical writings, may be defined as occurring where a *specific version of an event* in one historical source has been reinterpreted in another” (p. 290). Cf. Rubenstein, pp. 258–259.

<sup>7</sup> “A third means of isolating aggadic exegesis depends on a more subjective text-critical

improve the first account. Through such comparisons the motive and didactic thrust of the secondary account can be identified, such as eliminating unseemly descriptions of the sage-heros, and refining their character.<sup>8</sup> This approach allows us to go beyond the quantitative determination of textual dependencies<sup>9</sup> to the qualitative factor of purpose and *tendenz*. Not only the “what” and “how”, but also the “why”.<sup>10</sup> Thus literary creativity is discovered specifically by going outside the boundaries of the isolated narrative, and studying its interrelation with other texts.

A secondary aggadic text often makes extended use of existing expressions and turns of phrase. Verbose use of stereotypic talmudic vocabulary can be a marker of late narrative.<sup>11</sup> The intertextual phenomena discussed below relate to the talmudic corpus as a whole, with interplay between Bavli and Yerushalmi passages, among passages in the Bavli itself, and extensive restatement in secondary versions preserved in the manuscript tradition of one given passage.<sup>12</sup>

The long and intricate aggadic passage dealing with Rav Kahana at Bavli Bava Qamma 117ab describes the trying and difficult circumstances which led to Rav Kahana's ascent to Palestine. It is the Yerushalmi which recounts the trials and tribulations which led to his return to Babylonia. The relationship between these two passages provides the first focus of this paper.

The well-known Babylonian account describes Rav Kahana's zealous act of single-handedly executing a would-be informer, leading Rav to press Rav Kahana to flee to Palestine, where he appears at the academy of R. Yohanan and eventually challenges R. Yohanan's scholarly authority. This extended aggadic passage has been treated in classic studies by Daniel Sperber and Isaiah Gafni, and recently by Adiel Schremer.<sup>13</sup>

judgement. In these cases, a *traditum* is incorporated into a *tradito* – which transforms it or re-employs it” (Fishbane, *ibid*).

<sup>8</sup> As we will claim regarding the relationship between two distinct and ostensibly different narratives about R. Yohanan. On improving tarnished image and maturing of character in biblical narrative doublets, see Zakovitch, *Introduction*, p. 44–45; *Reflection*, pp. 23–36.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. S. Friedman, “Historical Aggadah in the Babylonian Talmud” (Hebrew), *Saul Lieberman Memorial Volume*, (offprint 1988), Jerusalem and New York, 1993, pp. 1–46.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. S. Friedman, “Dama ben Netina”, an Aggadic Transformation” (Hebrew, forthcoming).

<sup>11</sup> “Of particular aid and importance in this judgement is the dense occurrence in one text of terms, often thoroughly reorganized and transposed, found elsewhere in a natural, uncomplicated form” (Fishbane, *ibid*). Cf. S. Friedman, “A Critical Study of Yevamot X with a Methodological Introduction” (Hebrew), *Texts and Studies, Analecta Judaica* I, ed. H. Z. Dimitrovsky, New York, 1977, p. 328, and below, n. 54; Rubenstein, pp. 256–257.

<sup>12</sup> “Aggadic exegesis may also be noted and isolated by comparing parallel texts within the MT, or between the MT and its principal versions” (Fishbane, *ibid*).

<sup>13</sup> D. Sperber, “On the Unfortunate Adventures of Rav Kahana: A Passage of Saboraic Polemic from Sasanian Persia”, ed. Sh. Shaked, *Irano-Judaica*, Jerusalem 1982, pp. 83–100

The Babylonian account neatly divides itself into three acts:<sup>14</sup>

Act I. the execution of the informer and Rav's instructions to Rav Kahana to flee from Babylonia to Palestine.

Act II. R. Yohanan's academy where Rav Kahana bests R. Yohanan in the Talmudic debate, but succumbs to the deadly force of the gaze of his eyes.

Act III. The graveyard scene, where Rav Kahana is revived by R. Yohanan, and R. Yohanan humbly accepts Rav Kahana's scholarly mastery. Now in the role of Rav Kahana's *disciple*, R. Yohanan is graced by his newly acquired master with answers to all the outstanding questions and problems that he was unable to solve on his own.

Scholarly attention has been directed largely to act two. Here we will also address acts one and three.

## 1

## bBava Qamma 117ab

א. ההוא גברא דהוה בעי אחוויי אחיבנא דחבריה, אתא לקמיה דרב, א"ל לא תחוי ולא תחוי, א"ל: מחוינא ומחוינא. יתיב רב כהנא קמיה דרב, שמשיה לקועיה מיניה. קרי רב עילויה: בניך עולפו שכבו בראש כל חוצות כחוא מכמר, מה הוא זה כיון שנפל במכמר אין מרחמין עליו, אף ממון של ישראל כיון שנפל ביד נזים אין מרחמין עליו. א"ל רב כהנא, עד האידינא הווי יוונאי דלא קפדי אשפיכות דמים, והשתא איכא פרסאי<sup>15</sup> דקפדו אשפיכות דמים ואמרי מרדין מרדין,<sup>16</sup> קום סק לארעא דישראל, וקביל עלך דלא תקשי לרבי יוחנן שבע שנין.

= “The Misfortunes of Rav Kahana: A Passage of Post-Talmudic Polemic”, in D. Sperber, *Magic and Folklore in Rabbinic Literature*, Ramat Gan 1994 (pp. 145–164); I.M. Gafni, “The Babylonian Yeshiva as Reflected in Bava Qamma 117a”, *Tarbiz*, 49 (1980), pp. 292–301; *ibid.*, *The Jews of Babylonia in the Talmudic Era, A Social and Cultural History* (Hebrew), Jerusalem 1990, pp. 194–197; A. Schremer, “‘He Posed Him a Difficulty and Placed Him’ – A Study in the Evolution of the Text of TB *Bava Kama* 117 a” (Hebrew), *Tarbiz*, 66 (1997), pp. 403–415.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Gafni, “Yeshiva”, p. 292.

<sup>15</sup> Greeks ... Persians. This is the sequence in the manuscripts, referring to the transition from the Hellenized Parthian rule to Sasanian hegemony, which took place approximately 227 CE. Cf. R. Rabinovicz, *Variae Lectiones* ad loc., Munich 1882, p. 297, n. ע; E. S. Rosenthal, “For the Talmudic Dictionary – *Talmudica Iranica*”, *Irano-Judaica* (above, n. 1) p. 55; Sperber, p. 88 (151).

<sup>16</sup> The words מרדין מרדין ואמרי are missing from most textual witnesses, see Rabinovicz, p. 298, n. פ. *Mardin* is an authentic Persian derivative, meaning ‘murder’, but it is not original to our passage. “One who flees due to *mardin*” appears in bBava Mesia 39a, bBava Batra 38b. Based upon those passages, the phrase under discussion was added here – Rav Kahana was indeed “one who fled due to *mardin*”. Cf. Rashi to Sukka 44a s.v. *vhaamar* (רב כהנא ... וברח לארץ ישראל לפני רבי יוחנן מחמת מרדין). Rashi (Sukka) did not have the phrase before us in his text of Bava Qamma 117, and makes use of the language in the other passages quoted. The same is true of Rashi at Bava Mesia 39a. However, the phrase is already cited from our passage in Rashbam's commentary to Bava Batra 38b (כדאמרינן) (בהגוזל ומאכיל השתא פרסאי דקפדי אשפיכות דמים ואמרי מרדין מרדין). On the word

ב. אזיל אשכחיה לריש לקיש דיתבי וקא מסיים מתיבתא דיומא לרבנן, אמר להו: ריש לקיש היכא? אמרו ליה אמאי? אמר להו האי קושיא והאי קושיא, והאי פירווקא והאי פירווקא. אמרו ליה לריש לקיש, אזיל ריש לקיש א"ל לרבי יוחנן ארי עלה מבבל: לעיין מר במתיבתא דלמחר. למחר אותבוה בדרא קמא קמיה דרי יוחנן, אמר שמעתתא ולא אקשי, שמעתתא ולא אקשי, אנתתיה אחרויי שבע דרי עד דאותביה בדרא בתרא. א"ל רבי יוחנן לריש בן לקיש: ארי שאמרת נעשה שועלו! אמר: יהא רעוא דהני שבע דרי להו חילוף שבע שנין דאמר לי רב. קם אכרעיה, א"ל: נהדר מר ברישא, אמר שמעתתא ואקשי, אוקמיה בדרא קמא, אמר שמעתתא ואקשי. ר' יוחנן הוה יתיב אשבע בסתרי, שלפי ליה חדא בסתרא מתותיה, אמר שמעתתא ואקשי ליה, עד דשלפי ליה כולהו בסתרי מתותיה עד דיתבי על ארעא. רבי יוחנן גברא סבא הוה ומסרחי גביניה, אמר להו: דלו לי עיני ואחוייה, דלו ליה במכחלתא דכספא, הוא דפרטיה שפותיה, סבר אחוך קמחיך בית, חלש דעתיה ונח נפשיה.

ג. למחר אמר להו רבי יוחנן לרבנן: חזיתו לבבלאה היכי עביד? אמרו ליה: דרכיה הכי. על לגבי מערתא, חזא דהוה הדרא ליה עכנא, א"ל: עכנא, עכנא, פתח פומך ויכנס הרב אצל תלמיד, ולא פתח. יכנס חבר אצל חבר, ולא פתח. יכנס תלמיד אצל הרב, פתח ליה, בעא רחמי ואוקמיה. א"ל: אי הוה ידענא דדרכיה דמר הכי לא חלשא דעתי, השתא ליתי מר בהדן, א"ל: אי מצית למיבעי רחמי דתו לא שכיבנא אזילנא, ואי לא – לא אזילנא, הואיל וחליף שעתא חליף. תיריה, אוקמיה, שייליה כל ספיקא דהוה ליה ופשטינהו ניהליה. היינו דאמר ר' יוחנן: דילכון אמרי, דילהון היא.

It is clear that the overall thrust and purpose of this long aggadic passage is establishing the ascendancy of Babylonian torah scholarship over that of Palestinian. Even R. Yohanan, the foremost scholar of the Palestinian school, acknowledged Rav Kahana as his master, and was beholden to him for the central insights of his teachings.<sup>17</sup> This is a fitting aggadic expression of the famous polemical position presented in the epistle of Pirqoi ben Baboi regarding the ascendancy of Babylonia over Palestine.<sup>18</sup>

The chronological scope of this story stretches historical credence. The extremely aged R. Yohanan, who died in 279 according to Rav Sherira Gaon, is made a contemporary of Rav, who died in 254. Thus it has been claimed that the end of the story is a separate and independent literary unit from the beginning.<sup>19</sup> However the explanation of chronological discrepancies does not lie in ascrib-

*ardin*, see Sperber, p. 86–87 (149–150) and n. 23. Rav Hai Gaon's explanation, "manslaughter" (*HaMeqah VebaMimkar*, par. 40 (Venice 1602, 73b), is quoted by Rashi at Bava Mešia 39a.

<sup>17</sup> L. Ginzberg, *A Commentary on the Palestinian Talmud*, I, New York 1941, p. 393; Sperber, p. 96 (160).

<sup>18</sup> Sperber, p. 98 (162). On the epistle, see Brody, *The Geonim of Babylonia and the Shaping of Medieval Jewish Culture*, New Haven and London 1998, p. 113 ff. Recognition of the polemical intent of having R. Yohanan accept the authority of Babylonian Torah knowledge does not necessarily determine that the reality was the opposite. Thus R. Yohanan's regard for Rav is recorded not only in the Bavli (Hyman, pp. 660–661), but also in the Yerushalmi, cf. yGittin ix 4, 50b (and corrections of commentators) where R. Yohanan retracts his ruling upon hearing that Rav and Shmuel ruled otherwise.

<sup>19</sup> Gafni, "Yeshiva", p. 292, n. 1; *History*, p. 194, n. 73.

ing a composite nature to the narrative, but rather in underscoring the license that the Babylonian narrator is prepared to take with historical facts and literary sources.<sup>20</sup> In order to demonstrate the intellectual victory of the Babylonian Rav Kahana over the Palestinian R. Yohanan it is preferable to present a mature R. Yohanan at the prime of his career, vanquished by Rav Kahana much his junior.<sup>21</sup>

Chronological problems regarding this story were already raised by the Tosafot. They focussed upon the dating of Rav Kahana's arrival in Palestine relative to Palestinian sages whom he was said to have met there.<sup>22</sup> Their conclusion was that Rav Kahana traveled to Palestine more than once (Sukka 44a; Gittin 84b), or that there were two sages named Rav Kahana who came to Eretz Yisrael in different periods (Kid 8a).<sup>23</sup>

The idea of two sages named Rav Kahana, both of whom were pupils of Rav, was not shared by all medieval authorities,<sup>24</sup> and has not been adopted by all modern scholars.<sup>25</sup> However, it became a basic tenet of the chronologists, and in our opinion it indeed appears to be a necessary assumption in making sense of a multiplicity of data.<sup>26</sup>

The first Rav Kahana and his colleague Rav Assi belonged to the first generation of Amoraim. In the Yerushalmi they are often referred to as Kahana and Assa, without the rabbinic title. They were indeed disciples of Rav. In the Yerushalmi it is recorded that "Kahana and Assa entered and debated before Rav".<sup>27</sup> In the Bavli: "Rav Kahana and Rav Assi, when they were standing before Rav".<sup>28</sup> However it would appear that Rav Kahana and Rav Assi were already accomplished scholars when they sat at the feet of Rav. They were not in need of his analysis, but were quite in need of the traditions which he brought from Eretz Yisrael.<sup>29</sup>

The relative rank and status among Rav, Shmuel and Rav Assi was complex and overlapping, to such an extent that who would honor whom when entering

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Friedman, "Historical Aggadah".

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Sperber, p. 96 (160). As to the young age of Rav Kahana, see below in the Palestinian parallels. Even in the Babylonian account the impetuous Rav Kahana is certainly portrayed as being in his younger years.

<sup>22</sup> Without going into the details here, some of which can be redirected based upon Palestinian sources.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Sperber, p. 88 (152), n. 33.

<sup>24</sup> *Pisqa Rosh* Kidd 4, par. 24.

<sup>25</sup> Ginzberg (p. 394, s.v. *domeh*), who discusses Rav Kahana in a broad chronological context, make no allusion to there having been two disciples of Rav bearing this name; cf. E.S. Rosenthal, "Talmudica", p. 110, n. 26.

<sup>26</sup> See I. Halevy, *Dorot Harisichonim* (Hebrew), Ha. Frankfurt a. M., 1901 (= Jerusalem 1967, vol. 5), pp. 238–41; Sperber, p. 99 (163), n. 68, and below.

<sup>27</sup> ySukka i 1, 52a.

<sup>28</sup> bShevuot 26a.

<sup>29</sup> bNazir 19a. This interplay corroborates the conclusion of the anonymous sugya at bSanhedrin 36b.



whom Rav Kahana meets on the street in Eretz Yisrael are aware of the miraculous incident reported in the Bavli where Rav Kahana dies as a result of the encounter with R. Yohanan, is buried, and is eventually revived. In the interim he is in heaven, and therefore **מה קלא בשמיא**, “what voice did you hear in heaven”.

Rashi’s approach of viewing the episode in the Yerushalmi as a continuation of the events recorded in the Bavli presents a tantalizing symmetry. Rav Kahana kills the informer in Babylonia and flees to Eretz Yisrael, where he caused the death of two people and fled back to Babylonia. It is more than questionable however whether Babylonian and Palestinian aggada can be read in one-dimensional sequence. The redactional relationship of the two passages must be addressed. However, we must first determine whether an explanation of the question **מה קלא בשמיא** can be supplied without reading the Bavli into the Yerushalmi.

A philological investigation of the word **סנין** has recently led Shlomo Naeh in this direction. The opening phrase of this story **כהנא הוה עולם סנין** presents a problem. **עולם** means lad or young man. **סני** or **סנין** means “much” or “very”. A very lad or a much young man does not make sense. The standard explanation has taken **עולם** as an adjective meaning “young”.<sup>38</sup> Naeh’s solution is based upon biblical Aramaic where **שג** means large or tall, as in Daniel 2, 31 **הוה הנייה חד שגיא** “As you looked on, there appeared a great statue”. This meaning appears also in biblical Hebrew. Psalms 92, 13 **כארז בלבנון ישגה** should be translated, “He shall grow tall like a cedar in Lebanon”.<sup>39</sup>

Rav Kahana was a *tall* lad and the rogues taunted him about it: “You with your head in the clouds, how’s the weather up there? What voice did you hear in heaven?”<sup>40</sup>

For the purposes of our investigation we can conclude that the guys outside have no need of the miraculous story in the Bavli in order to tease Rav Kahana about his height. Incidentally, we can now register a physical description of an Amora – the second Rav Kahana – and add it to the very few physical descriptions of sages found in the talmudic corpus.<sup>41</sup> Rav Kahana, the young energetic torah scholar, could have appeared in the eyes of the local jokers as a lanky lad from Babylonia, thus making him an easy mark for their jibes.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>38</sup> R. Asher provided a Hebrew equivalent: **מה ילד מאד** (*Pisqe HaRosh* ibid, q.v.) which reflects the same strangeness of usage with **ילד**.

<sup>39</sup> Rather than JPS “thrive”.

<sup>40</sup> This solution was partly anticipated by Sperber, who wrote, “What’s being said up there in heaven” was probably some kind of local idiom, and here reflects the mocking scorn for the bright young scholar with his “head in the heavens” (p. 95 [158], n. 52).

<sup>41</sup> The bBava Qamma account does incorporate a physical characteristic of Rav Kahana in its narrative – his lips were parted. On this, see below.

<sup>42</sup> See S. Lieberman, “That is how it Was and That is how it Shall Be” – The Jews of Eretz Israel and World Jewry During Mishnah and Talmud Times” (Hebrew), *Cathedra*, 17 (1980),

However, our insight about Rav Kahana gained from this passage goes beyond his physical description. The revelation of Rav Kahana’s traits of character appears in what he says about himself and in what we can read between the lines. His self-criticism is palpable. “I came to do good, and I end up sinning”. Let us attempt an exact understanding of what sin is meant? Rav Kahana found himself in the context of a social reality in which a Babylonian scholar immigrating to Palestine is subjugated to a mocking initiation procedure.<sup>43</sup> A similar fate befell Rav Zeira, as is recounted in the continuation of the Yerushalmi passage regarding a run-in between R. Zeira and a certain butcher, who wanted to charge him fifty coins and a slap in the face. Rav Zeira offered more money but at the end he had to agree to the offensive deal. The butcher’s fate was the same that befell the rascals who taunted Rav Kahana. When the sages sent for the butcher they found his funeral procession. They said to Rav Zeira, “Your reaction was so strong?” “No”, said Rav Zeira, “I did not vent my anger upon him because I thought it was the local custom”. It was rather divine punishment that was meted out to the butcher for demeaning Rav Zeira. Rav Zeira himself did not lose his temper and did not become angry. A contrast is intended here with Rav Kahana. He did not remain temperate, but issued a cutting retort: “Your death sentence is sealed”.

Rav Kahana did not directly take the lives of the two taunters. It was heavenly justice which exacted punishment for their disrespectful behavior towards the young sage. But Rav Kahana did not – could not – exert the self-control required by the situation,<sup>44</sup> and he is painfully aware of this. “I came here to do good and I ended up sinning”.

This introspective self-criticism is a veritable prayer on the part of Rav Kahana for more moderation, temperance and self-restraint, instead of rash or impulsive behavior. However his very next act in taking surreptitious leave of R. Yohanan is still far from the hallmark of a mature scholar.<sup>45</sup> “Would he have gone without taking leave?”, asks R. Yohanan. “The question he asked was his way of taking leave”, is the explanation. This ignominious escape is in sharp contrast to the glorious victory which Rav Kahana achieved over R. Yohanan as recorded in the Bavli.

p. 7 (= ed. D. Rosenthal, *Studies in Palestinian Talmudic Literature*, Jerusalem 1991, p. 235). Citing the description of Rav Kahana smiting the informer with a single blow, Lieberman writes: “Here the ruffian saw a person who was very young, and strong, dressed in the scholar’s mantle, and wearing shoes [in the Palestinean heat, rather than sandals. S.F.]. He asked him, ‘What’s going on in heaven’ ... Apparently the ruffians, who saw Rav Kahana, understood that blows were out of the question – teasing is possible but not striking”. But would they have teased a strapping giant? If we leave the muscular description to the Bavli, the young Rav Kahana in the Yerushalmi appears less threatening.

<sup>43</sup> See Lieberman, *ibid*.

<sup>44</sup> “... he reacted the best way he could, with his scathing tongue” (Sperber, p. 95 [158]).

<sup>45</sup> “... he did so after extracting permission from R. Johanan with guile and craft” (Sperber, p. 95 [158]).

Were we to read the aggadic accounts of Rav Kahana in the Bavli and Yerushalmi as a literary continuum our appreciation of the unique qualities of each would suffer. On the other hand we cannot escape recognizing the similarity or identity of motifs. In both stories we find Rav Kahana involved in causing the death of his opponent, here the informer and there the taunters. In each case he is forced to flee. His behavior is less than temperate both episodes case. In the Bavli Rav voices implicit criticism of Rav Kahana's overall personality pattern. "Promise that you won't challenge R. Yohanan for seven years", fit penitence for the impulsive and impetuous desciple over-zealous in vanquishing his master.<sup>46</sup>

We wish to suggest that the coincidence of these themes should not be ascribed to the repetitive nature of Rav Kahana's personality patterns, but rather to the redactional relationship of the two passages. Once more, this means the recasting of original Palestinian material as part of the active and creative reworking of their sources by the Babylonian aggadists.

The Palestinian portrayal of Rav Kahana and the death of his adversaries presents the young sage as awkward and uncertain of himself,<sup>47</sup> ignominiously slipping away from R. Yohanan. In the Babylonian retelling he exerts remarkable physical strength and exudes extraordinary self-confidence and aplomb. All of this is fitting and proper as a prefiguration of the second act, where Rav Kahana is a veritable lion, easily vanquishing R. Yohanan in a dramatic scholarly confrontation. Thus it serves the polemical purposes of the Babylonian account in redirecting the basic tradition that Rav Kahana caused the death of his antagonist to new lines, picturing him as fearless and unrestrained, in prime fighting shape, as he destroys the informer with a single blow, leading up to his scholarly confrontation with R. Yohanan.

Literarily speaking, the Yerushalmi account, in comparison to its Babylonian parallel, appears highly superior – humorous, witty, sensitive and perceptive. Furthermore, the Bavli has removed the supernatural, and rationalized the circumstances of causing the death of the adversary in this-worldly political terms. However, this is done in a completely aggadic context, without expanding upon the halahkic or moral dimension regarding the would-be informer. The execution of the informer is no longer part of a "historical kernel", now that a separate literary kernel has been identified in the Yerushalmi.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>46</sup> See bTaanit 9b, top, where Rav Papa added to his daily prayers, "God save me from the embarrassment [inflicted] by Shimi [bar Ashi]".

<sup>47</sup> "What we find here is a young unsettled Babylonian, unhappy in a strange and hostile Palestinian environment" (Sperber, p. 95 [158]).

<sup>48</sup> J. Neusner already cast doubt upon the historicity of this event, in terms of his own analysis (*A History of the Jews in Babylonia*, II, Leiden 1966, p. 31). Sperber directed attention from the historical dimension to the literary: "our author drew upon diverse elements culled from a variety of sources, be they Sassanian or Rabbinic, embellishing them on a small historical kernel whose exact dimensions are by now obscured" (p. 97 [160]). E.S.

## 3

We now turn to the third act. In order to explain its themes we must examine another Rav Kahana story which appears in the Yerushalmi, with parallels in Vayikra Rabbah and Pesikta de Rav Kahana.

*Pesikta de Rav  
Kahana*, p. 345

*Wayyikra Rabbah* 29  
(pp. 684–5)

*yRosh HaShana* iv 1, 59b

דילמא. ר' יוחנן ור' שמעי  
בן לקיש הוון מתקשיין.  
תנינן יום טוב של ראש  
השנה שחל להיות בשבת,  
במקדש היו תוקעין אבל  
לא במדינה. אמרין אין  
דבר תורה במדינה ידחה,  
ואם אינו דבר תורה אף  
במקדש לא ידחה.

עד אינון יתיבין מתקשין  
עבר כהנא. אמרין הא  
אתא מרה דשמעתא  
ניקום ונשאלול. קמון  
ושאלין ליה, א' להם כתוב  
אחד אומי יום תרועה  
יהיה לכם (במדבר כט א).  
וכתו אחד אוי זכרון  
תרועה יהיה לכם (ויקרא  
כג כד). הא כאיצד  
יתקיימו שני כתובין, בזמן  
שהוא בא בחול יום תרועה  
יהיה לכם, ובזמן שהוא  
בא בשבת זכרון תרועה  
יהיה לכם. מזכירין אבל  
לא תוקעין

ר' יוחנן ורשב"ל הוון יתיבין  
ומקשיין בשמעתתא. עבר  
כהנא אמרין הא אתא  
מרה דשמעתא ניקום  
ונשיליניה קמון ושאלוניה  
תנינן יום טוב של ראש  
השנה שחל להיות בשבת  
במקדש היו תוקעים אבל  
לא במדינה, משחרב בית  
המקדש התקין רבן יוחנן  
בן זכאי שיהיו תוקעין בכל  
מקום שיש בו בית דין. אם  
דבר תורה ידחה בגבולין,  
אם לאו אף במקדש לא  
ידחה. אמ' להן כתי אחד  
אומי יום תרועה יהיה  
לכם (במדבר כט א), וכת'  
אחד אומי שבתון זכרון  
תרועה מקרא קדש  
(ויקרא כג כד), הא כיצד,  
בזמן שהוא בא בחול יום  
תרועה יהיה לכם, ובזמן  
שבא בשבת זכרון תרועה  
מקרא קדש, מזכירין ולא  
תוקעין

רבי אבא בר פפא א"ר  
יוחנן ורשב"ל הוון יתיבין  
מקשיין אמרין תנינן יום  
טוב של ראש השנה שחל  
להיות בשבת במקדש היו  
תוקעין אבל לא במדינה  
אין דבר תורה הוא אף  
בגבולין ידחה אין לית הוא  
דבר תורה אף במקדש לא  
ידחה

עבר כהנא אמרין הא  
גברא (רבה) דנישאלול (ליה)  
אתון שאלון ליה אמר לון  
כתוב אחד אומר יום  
תרועה וכתוב אחר אומר  
זכרון תרועה הא כיצד  
בשעה שהוא חל בחול יום  
תרועה בשעה שהר חל  
בשבת זכרון תרועה  
מזכירין אבל לא תוקעין

In this passage the relationship between Rav Kahana and R. Yohanan is completely reversed from what we have seen until now. Rav Kahana is neither an uncomfortable visitor nor a would be upstart. Here Kahana is the mature scholar and R. Yohanan seeks out his wisdom and learning. R. Yohanan and Resh Laqish are portrayed here as sitting and studying together, when they raise

Rosenthal staunchly upheld the historicity of the capital punishment meted out to the would-be informer in Rav's court (*Talmudica*, pp. 56–58). See also S. Albeck, *Law Courts in Talmudic Times* (Hebrew), Ramat Gan 1980, p. 90.

a difficulty regarding sounding the *shofar* on Shabbat.<sup>49</sup> At that moment Rav Kahana passes by. They rise in his presence and seek torah from his mouth. Rav Kahana is a great scholar at that time, called נבִרָא in the Yerushalmi and מֵרָא דְשִׁמְעָתָא, master of the teachings, in the midrashim. R. Yohanan and Resh Laqish are clearly subservient to him.<sup>50</sup>

This cannot be the same Rav Kahana who slipped away from R. Yohanan surreptitiously by posing a halakhic question to him,<sup>51</sup> as some have claimed.<sup>52</sup> The reversal of roles and relative status would make that hardly possible. This is certainly the *first* Rav Kahana, who came to Eretz Yisrael in an earlier period. He was a sought out authority at that time, when R. Yohanan's teacher R. Hoshaya also turned to him with a halakhic question.

This description of R. Yohanan asking Kahana for instruction and the tradition behind it would appear to be the literary kernel of the third act. There R. Yohanan presents himself as Rav Kahana's disciple and receives from his master answers to all his questions.

Thus the first act appears to be a radical reworking of a Palestinian account concerning the *second* Rav Kahana, who causes death with lack of self-restraint, and the third act is a Babylonian expansion of the tradition that R. Yohanan revered the *first* Rav Kahana, and turned to him regarding perplexing questions.

This type of literary composition, fusing traditions concerning two separate individuals of the same name, can be compared to the account in Moed Katan 25a regarding the death of Rav Huna, and his burial in Eretz Yisrael in the burial cave of Rabbi Hiyya and his sons. The story reads as one smooth continuum,

<sup>49</sup> See D. Henshke, "The Sounding of the *Shofar* on the Sabbath" (Hebrew), *Sidra* 8 (1992), p. 29, n. 43; the passage still requires clarification.

<sup>50</sup> The Yerushalmi and midrashim frequently portray contemporaries "sitting" together in a learning situation. Often it is said that they were raising a difficulty ("מקשיין, מקשוין, מקשין"). In a number of cases it is further stated that an authoritative sage passed by (עבר) or the like, and they presented their difficulty or question to him. In these settings the sage is frequently referred to as מֵרָא דְשִׁמְעָתָא or נבִרָא (y. Sheviit vii 3, 37c), meaning 'a great sage', even without the adjective רבָה (cf. biblical Hebrew נבִר). In some of these contexts מֵרָא דְשִׁמְעָתָא appears to be taken as 'master (= author) of the teaching under discussion' (Bereshit Rabba 35, p. 328–9 = Pesikta de Rav Kahana, 11, p. 190). However, in another case the question would not appear to be connected with a specific teaching authored by מֵרָא דְשִׁמְעָתָא (Bereshit Rabba 62, p. 676), as in the midrashim cited above. Consequently we suggest that this phrase means master of teachings, a general phrase for a great sage, similar in meaning to the Yerushalmi's נבִרָא. Cf. b. Moed Katan 16a (קפרא) וְהָא רַבִּי שְׁמַעוֹן בַּר רַבִּי וְכֵן קִפְרָא הוּוּ יְחִבֵּי וְקָא גִרְסֵי, קְשִׁיא לְהוּ שְׁמַעְתָּא. אָמַר לִיה רַבִּי שְׁמַעוֹן לְבַר קִפְרָא דְבַר זֶה צְרִיךְ רַבִּי. (אָמַר לִיה בַּר קִפְרָא לְרַבִּי שְׁמַעוֹן וּמָה רַבִּי אָוִם בְּדַבְרֵי זֶה? אָוִם אָמַר לִיה לְאִבּוֹתַי, אִיִּקְפֵּד. In this passage "Rabbi" is a *double entendre* for 'Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi' and 'a great sage'.

<sup>51</sup> See Halevy, *ibid.*, p. 238; A. Hyman, *Toldoth Tannaim ve'Amoraim*, London 1910 (Jerusalem 1964), p. 842; Sperber, p. 94 (157–58) n. 51.

<sup>52</sup> In his edition of Wayyikra Rabbah (p. 685), Mordecai Margulies claimed that this Rav Kahana is the same regarding whom Resh Laqish announced to R. Yohanan "a lion has come up from Babylonia", in Bava Qamma 117a.

but a seam is discernable. The second part, describing the burial, derives from an original story not about Rav Huna the Amora but about Rav Huna the exilarch, whose body was brought from Babylonia to Eretz Yisrael for burial, as is clear from the parallel passage in Yerushalmi Kilaim. Rav Huna the Amora, as far as we know, was buried in Babylonia. The identity of names, "Rav Huna", and the similar subject of the two accounts, the death of a great personality, were sufficient to fuse the two stories into one continuous narrative, despite the fact that the first account is about Rav Huna the Amora and the second originated regarding Rav Huna the exilarch.<sup>53</sup>

So in the Bava Qamma narrative dealing with Rav Kahana, the identity of names and general historical period of the two sages allows for the creative fusion of the two traditions, with the earlier event now servicing as the climax of the later episode. The result of this artful fusion, together with the other embellishments, now has the aged R. Yohanan, supreme sage of Palestinian, paying obeisance to the lanky young scholar, the *infant terrible* of Babylonia, who is now credited as the source of R. Yohanan's torah knowledge.

## 4

In its final form the full aggadic passage in the Bavli contains three separate acts, and is of exceptional length, comprising 350 words. It has all the appearances of a late, post-classical composition, long, and exceptionally creative and innovative in reworking its sources, even beyond the measure of the standard Babylonian aggada. The plethora of rhetoric and phraseology in our story which is similar to other passages in the Bavli is typical of late aggadic compositions which draw upon existing Babylonian aggadot for both language and content.<sup>54</sup>

I. Rav himself was involved in an incident (Yoma 87a)<sup>55</sup> in which a man died due to a blow to the windpipe! Rav had a dispute with a certain butcher [!], who refrained from appearing before Rav to make emends. Rav decided to go to the butcher shop on the eve of Yom Kippur to settle the affair. The butcher, who was

<sup>53</sup> Friedman, pp. 146–61.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Sperber, p. 97 [160]; Friedman, p. 164 regarding this aggada in bBava Qamma ("וכל אותו מעשה עשו בהרחבה ובסממנים ממקומות אחרים"). Also see my remarks there (p. 123 n. 12, p. 139, n. 106) concerning the long aggadic passage about Rabba bar Nahmani (Bava Mešia 86a). On aggadic borrowings, cf. S. Friedman, *Talmud Arukh*, commentary volume, Jerusalem 1990, p. 150.

<sup>55</sup> רב הוה ליה מילתא בהדי ההוא פכתא. לא אתא לקמיה. במעלי יומא דכפורי אמר ליה איהו איזיל אנא לפיוסי ליה. פגע ביה רב הונא. אמר ליה להיכא קא אזיל מרי אמר לפיוסי לפלניא. אמר אזיל אבא למיקטל נפשא. אזל וקם עילויה. הוה יתיב וקא פלי רישא, דלי עיניה וחזייה. אמר ליה אבא את. זיל. לית לי מילתא בהדיך בהדי דקא פלי רישא אישחמיש גרמא. ומחזיה בקועיה, וקפליה.

chopping a head on the block, rebuffed Rav as soon as he saw him. At that point, a bone flew up from the head being chopped and became lodged in the butcher's windpipe, causing his death.<sup>56</sup> On the way to the rendezvous Rav had met his disciple Rav Huna, who voiced the premonition, "Abba [= Rav] is on the way to kill someone".

Rav Kahana's killing of the informer through the means of knocking out his windpipe is strange and unexplained, and can hardly be taken as a way an unarmed man would suddenly "execute" his target. Neither can it be taken as a reasonable literary form of expression for such. In contrast, the butcher's "accident" is described perfectly naturally. While facing the block and chopping, a sharp sliver of bone flew out, and struck him frontally in the most penetrable part of his upper body – the throat!<sup>57</sup>

II. The second act has many similarities to the narrative about R. Yohanan and Resh Laqish in Bava Meṣia 84a<sup>58</sup> which resembles the Rav Kahana encounter thematically: R. Yohanan became incensed at Resh Laqish, thus causing Resh Laqish's death, which resulted in R. Yohanan suffering pangs of remorse. Juxtaposed to the R. Yohanan-Resh Laqish account in BQ is a series of aggadot regarding the tanna R. Elazer b. R. Shimon [bar Yohai].<sup>59</sup> Similarities in language and theme to the Rav Kahana narrative span both parts of the Bava Meṣia complex. They are summarized below.

bBava Qamma 117ab

Bava Meṣia 84a

יומא חד הוה קא סחי רבי יוחנן בירדנא,  
חזייה ריש לקיש ושורר לירדנא אבחריה,  
אמר ליה: חילך לאורייתא אמר ליה:  
שופרך לנשי? אמר ליה: אי הדרת בך  
יהיבנא לך אחותי, דשפירא מינא קביל  
עליה. בעי למיהדר לאחתי מאניה ולא  
מצי הדר. אקרייה ואתנייה, ושווייה גברא  
רבא.

יומא חד הוה מפלגי בי מדרשא: הסייף  
והסכין והפיגון והרומח ומגל יד ומגל  
קציר מאימתי מקבלין שומאה משעת  
גמר מלאכתן, ומאימתי גמר מלאכתן?

אזיל אשכחיה לריש לקיש דיתבי וקא  
מסיים מתיבתא דיומא לרבנן, אמר להו:  
ריש לקיש היכא? אמרו ליה: אמאי?

<sup>56</sup> See Rabbinovicz, *Variae Lectiones* ad loc., pp. 306–307.

<sup>57</sup> In Yoma Rashi correctly glossed this word גרנתו, 'throat', 'trachea', but in Bava Qamma Rashi glosses the same word מפרקתו שבר לצואריה, "[back of the] neck", thus attempting an explanation of how a deathblow could have been dealt. Syriac קועא means "bridge on the nose", "partition between the nostrils". In Babylonian Aramaic it means "throat", "[front of] neck". Literary recycling often leaves traces of the original context whose meaning is forced or unnatural in the new. The task of fuller integration is left for the commentator.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Schremer, pp. 411–12.

<sup>59</sup> See Friedman, p. 145.

רבי יוחנן אומר: משיצרפם בכבשן, ריש  
לקיש אמר: משיצחצחון במים. אמר  
ליה: לסטאה בלסטיותיה ידע? אמר  
ליה: ומאי אהנת ליה? התם רבי קרו לך,  
הכא רבי קרו לך. אמר ליה: אהנאי לך  
דאקרבינד תחת כנפי השכינה. חלש  
דעתיה דרבי יוחנן, חלש ריש לקיש  
אחאי אחתיה קא בכיא, אמרה ליה:  
עשה בשביל בני אמר לה: עזבה יחמין  
אני אחיה (ירמיה משי יא). עשה בשביל  
אלמנתו! אמר לה: ואלמנתוך עלי  
תבטחו (שם). נח נפשיה דרבי שמעון בן  
לקיש, והוה קא מצטער רבי יוחנן בתריה  
שובא, אמרו רבנן: מאן לזייל ליתביה  
לדעתיה נזיל רבי אלעזר בן פדת,  
דמחדדין שמעתיה, אזיל יתיב קמיה, כל  
מילתא דהוה אמר רבי יוחנן אמר ליה:  
תניא דמסייעא לך. אמר: את כבר  
לקישא? בר לקישא, כי הוה מינא  
מילתא הוה מקשי לי עשרין וארבע  
קושייתא, ומפיקנא ליה עשרין וארבעה  
פרובן, וממילא רווחא שמעתא, ואת  
אמרת תניא דמסייע לך, אטו לא ידענא  
דשפיר קאמינא? הוה קא אזיל וקרע  
מאניה, וקא בכי ואמר: היכא את בר  
לקישא, היכא את בר לקישא, והוה קא  
צוח עד דשף דעתיה [מיניה]. בעו רבנן  
רחמי עליה ונח נפשיה

Bava Meṣia 84b, II. 37–48

דכי הוה יתבי רבן שמעון בן גמליאל ורבי  
יהושע בן קרחה אספסלי, יתבי קמיהו  
רבי אלעזר ברבי שמעון ורבי אצטעא,  
מקשו ומפרקו. אמרי: מימיהן אנו  
שותים והם יושבים על גבי קרקע? עבדו  
להו ספסלי, אספסלנהו. אמר להו רבן  
שמעון בן גמליאל: פרייה אחת יש לי  
בניכם, ואתם מבקשים לאבדה הימני?  
אחתהו לרבי. אמר להו רבי יהושע בן  
קרחה: מי שיש לו אב יחיה, ומי שאין לו  
אב ימות? אחתהו נמי לרבי אלעזר ברבי  
שמעון, חלש דעתיה. אמר: קא חשביתו  
ליה כוותי? עד ההוא יומא, כי הוה אמר  
רבי מילתא – הוה מסייע ליה רבי אלעזר  
ברבי שמעון, מכאן ואילך, כי הוה אמר  
רבי יש לי להשיב, אמר ליה רבי אלעזר  
ברבי שמעון: כך וכך יש לך להשיב, זו  
היא חשבתך, השתא היקפתו תשובות

אמר להו: האי קושא והאי קושא,  
והאי פירוקא והאי פירוקא, אמרו ליה  
לריש לקיש, אזיל ריש לקיש איל לרבי  
יוחנן, אבי עלה מבבל, לעיין מר  
במתיבתא דלמחר, למחר אותבוה בדרא  
קמא קמיה דרי יוחנן, אמר שמעתהא  
ולא אקשי, שמעתהא ולא אקשי,  
אנחתיה אחורי שבע דרי עד דאותביה  
בדרא בתרא, איל רבי יוחנן לריש בן  
לקיש: אבי שאמרת נעשה שועל? אמר:  
יהא רעוא דהני שבע דרי להו חילוף שבע  
שנין דאמר לי רב, קם אכרעיה, איל:  
נהדר מר ברישא, אמר שמעתהא ואקשי,  
אוקמיה בדרא קמא, אמר שמעתהא  
ואקשי, רי יוחנן הוה יתיב אשבע  
בסתרי, שלפי ליה חדא בסתריא  
מתותיה, אמר שמעתהא ואקשי ליה, עד  
דשלפי ליה כולהו בסתרי מתותיה עב  
דיתבי על ארעא, רבי יוחנן גברא סבא  
הוה ומסרחי גביניה, אמר להו: דלו לי  
עיני ואחזייה, דלו ליה במכחלתא  
דכספא, הוא דפרטיה שפותיה, סבר  
אחור קמחידן ביה, חלש דעתיה ונח  
נפשיה, למחר אמר להו רבי יוחנן לרבנן:  
חזיתו לבבלאה היכי עביד? אמרו ליה:  
דרכיה הכי.



חבילות שאין בהן ממש. חלש דעתיה  
 ברבנן. אחא אמר ליה לאבות. אמר ליה:  
 בני, אל ירע שהוא ארי בן ארי. ואחא  
 ארי בן שועל.

Bava Meṣia 84b, II.32–33

אשכחה לעכנא דהררא לה למערחא.  
 אמרו לה: עכנא עכנא פתחי פיך ויכנס בן  
 אצל אבינו. פתח לה.

על לגבי מערחה, חזא דהוה הררא ליה  
 עכנא, א"ל עכנא עכנא פתח פומיך  
 ויכנס הרב אצל תלמיד, ולא פתח. יכנס  
 חבר אצל חבר, ולא פתח. יכנס תלמיד  
 אצל הרב, פתח ליה, בעא רחמי  
 ואוקמיה. א"ל אי הוה ידענא דדרכיה  
 דמר הכי לא חלשא דעתך, השתא לית  
 מר בהדן, א"ל אי מצית למיבעי רחמי  
 דתו לא שכיבנא אזילנא, ואי לא לא  
 אזילנא, הואיל וחליף שעתא חליף.  
 תייריה, אוקמיה, שייליה כל ספיא  
 דהוה ליה ופשינהו ניהליה. היינו דאמר  
 ר' יוחנן דילכוך אמרי, דילהון היא.

The following specific similarities of language and theme should be noted:

(a) Rav Kahana's first line: "Where is Resh Laqish?" (ריש לקיש היכא) echoes R. Yohanan's pathetic refrain, "Where are you Bar Laqisha, where are you Bar Laqisha?" (היכא את בר לקישא, היכא את בר לקישא).

(b) The rapid fire sequence of question and answer which Rav Kahana presents, all in his own monologue ("והאי קושיא, והאי קושיא, והאי קושיא") recalls the style of the two-sided forays engaged in by R. Yohanan and Resh Laqish (וארבע עשרין ווארבע פרוקי).<sup>60</sup>

(c) Rav Kahana's scholastic virtuosity is described by Resh Laqish when he says, "A lion has ascended from Babylonia" (ארי עלה מבבל), and is put down by R. Yohanan, "The lion that you mentioned has become a fox" (ארי שאמרתי). The lion-fox theme, and even the switching of the lion to a fox,

<sup>60</sup> Cf. bShabbat 33b (דמעיקרא כי הוה מקשי רבי שמעון בן יוחי קושיא הוה מפרק ליה) רבי פנחס בן יאיר הריס פירוקי. לסוף כי הוה מקשי רבי פנחס בן יאיר קושיא הוה מפרק (ליה רבי שמעון בן יוחי עשרין וארבעה פירוקי). Cf. Taanit 23a. The ability to fend off *qushya* challenges appears as a definitive requirement of the sage in bBrakhot 27b regarding R. Elazar b. Azaria's eligibility to head the *yeshiva* (הוא חכם – דאי מקשי ליה מפרק ליה) and is absent in the Palestinian parallel (yBrakhot iv 1, 7d; yTaanit iv 1, 67d). Rubenstein has shown that the *qushya-peruqa* dialectic is a late Babylonian feature, with affinities to the geonic *yeshiva* (pp. 125–6, 341 n. 66, 245, 272–279, 400–401).

occurs in the other segment of the Bava Qamma cycle, where Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel takes the blame for his son's (Rabbi's) being vanquished by R. Elazar b. R. Shimon: "He is a lion son of a lion, and you are a lion son of a fox (הוה ארי בן ארי ואתה ארי בן שועל). This theme is part of the original Palestinian building blocks of the traditions relating to R. Elazar b. R. Shimon.<sup>61</sup>

(d) Even the theme of the vanquished scholar being lowered from his seat to sit on the floor, which takes on specific Persian garb of the seven cushions in the Bava Qamma episode,<sup>62</sup> corresponds to the raising and lowering of seating positions of Rabbi and R. Elazar b. R. Shimon.

(e) The lowered protagonist in both accounts suffers embarrassment and depression, "weakness of mind" (חלש דעתיה). This weakness of mind suffered by an affronted or lowered hero is a common theme of both strands of the Bava Meṣia cycle. "R. Yohanan had weakness of mind" when affronted by Resh Laqish (חלש דעתיה דרבי יוחנן). In the second Rabbi Simeon ben Elazar had weakness of mind when he perceived – incorrectly – that the reason he was lowered was that their teachers considered him no more than an equal of Rabbi.<sup>63</sup>

(f) Weakness of mind suffered by the scholarly hero, when not unjustified, exacts its dire consequences. In the first Bava Meṣia strand the juxtaposed repetition of the verb underscores the cause and effect relationship: "R. Yohanan had weakness of mind and Resh Laqish became weak ... and died (חלש דעתיה) (דרבי יוחנן, חלש ריש לקיש ... נח נפשיה).<sup>64</sup> In the second the weakness of mind was based on a misunderstanding, and Rabbi is saved from death, but in any case R. Elazar b. R. Shimon makes sure to demonstrate his superiority, causing Rabbi weakness of mind measure for measure.

In the Bava Qamma narrative the cause for R. Yohanan's weakness of mind is multiple: being ignominiously vanquished by the young Rav Kahana together with being lowered to the ground, and the (mistaken) perception that Rav Kahana was laughing at him. The last detail not only repeats the tragic element of mistaken perception found in Bava Meṣia,<sup>65</sup> but also allows for the artistic allusion, here albeit in Persian metaphor,<sup>66</sup> of a the tradition that it is the blighting glance of the master that precedes the verdict.<sup>67</sup> This effect of the

<sup>61</sup> yShabbat x, 12c; Pesikta de Rav Kahana, p. 200. See W. Bacher, *JQR* (o.s.) 5 (1893), p. 170, where the R. Elazar connection should be added.

<sup>62</sup> Sperber, p. 87 (150) and n. 24, pp. 91–93 [154–57].

<sup>63</sup> MS Hamburg 165). כותיה חשיבו לי.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. Schremer, p. 411, who also quotes the tannaitic textual precedent (see below. n. 68) for the death of the disciple who challenged his master improperly.

<sup>65</sup> And for that purpose attributes to Rav Kahana the physical feature of separated lips. This then is not a historic description of an Amora but an artful literary attribution allowing the tragic development of misperception and subsequent remorse: "Had I known ...".

<sup>66</sup> Sperber, p. 89–90 (153–54).

<sup>67</sup> Sperber, p. 90 (153–54), and n. 40; Friedman, p. 145 and n. 160.

“look” is already described in tannaitic literature. When R. Yehudah b. Nahman challenged R. Tarfon beyond accepted propriety, it was R. Akiva who fixed his gaze upon the errant disciple. In less than 50 days R. Yehudah was dead.<sup>68</sup>

(g) The death and burial of R. Elazar b. R. Shimon were already a developed theme in the Palestinian legends which preceded the Babylonian Bava Mešia account.<sup>69</sup> When R. Elazar b. R. Shimon died he was not buried in the burial cave where his father, R. Shimon bar Yohai lay, but elsewhere.<sup>70</sup> Rabbi Shimon appeared to the people of Meron and said, “My right eye which I had (= my dear son), I did not merit to have placed with me”. When R. Elazar b. R. Shimon was finally brought there, the entourage was accompanied by two fiery serpents. The entrance to the cave was also guarded by two fiery serpents. Finally “they brought him and placed him next to his father”.

The serpent account in Bava Mešia, portrayed in the traditional imagery of the snake with his tail in his mouth,<sup>71</sup> is merely a pale summary of the fiery scene of the original Palestinian account. However, the essence is preserved; permission to enter is requested in order to bury R. Elazar b. R. Shimon next to his father: “Open your mouth so that the son may enter next to his father” (עכנא פתח פיך ויכנס בן אצל אביו). This theme is reused in the Rav Kahana saga<sup>72</sup> for the live visitor asking permission to approach the dead.<sup>73</sup> “Open your mouth so that the master may enter [the place of] the disciple”. This metaphor is then put to further service in expressing the dramatic reversal of roles between R. Yohanan and Rav Kahana, which ends up being defined: “... so that the disciple may enter [the place of] the master”! (פתח פומיך ויכנס הרב אצל תלמיד, ולא פתח. יכנס תלמיד אצל הרב, פתח ליה).

III. In the final act Rav Kahana turns teacher of Rabbi Yohanan, and in a simple sepulchral *tête à tête* the newcomer, revived from death,<sup>74</sup> provides answers to all the unsolved questions and outstanding problems troubling the aged prince of Palestinian Torah scholarship. At the end of the entire narrative,

<sup>68</sup> Sifre Bemidbar, par. 148, p. 195 (הורה בן) אמר לו, יהודה בן נחמן צהבו פניך, שהשבת את הזקן, תמיה אני עליך אם תאריך ימים בעולם. אמר ר' יהודה ברי אלעאי בפסח היה הדבר, וכשבאתי לעצרת אמרתו היכן יהודה בן נחמן, אמרו לי הלך (77). Here the look is followed by a curse. The verses recited by R. Yohanan in his encounter with Resh Laqish (BQ) serve to same function (cf. Boyarin, *Carnal Israel*, Berkeley 1994, p. 218).

<sup>69</sup> Pesikta de Rav Kahana, ed. Mandelbaum, pp. 198–200.

<sup>70</sup> Such is the simple meaning there; only in the Bavli was this developed to mean that he was not buried at all!

<sup>71</sup> See Sperber, p. 85 (148), n. 17.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. Sperber *ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> Already our “Third Act”.

<sup>74</sup> This is also a reapplication of a literary theme occurring elsewhere, especially bAvoda Zara 10b (בעא רחמי עליה ואחיה ושרהיה. אמר ידענא זוסי דאיהו בכו מחיה מתים). Cf. bMegila 7b, bKetubot 62b; Mekhilta, p. 178, and parallels.

with all the appearance of an innocent afterthought, it is stated: “And this is why R. Yohanan was wont to say, ‘Your [= the Babylonian] sages teach’” (דאמר ר' יוחנן דילכון אמר).

The original locus of this statement by R. Yohanan is bSukka 44a, and can be understood as follows. Among R. Yohanan’s disciples were Babylonians, whom he would address on an individual basis, in certain contexts, with the salutation: “O Babylonian” (בבלייה). R. Hiyya bar Ba was one of these Babylonian disciples. Once R. Yohanan took an olive to eat, and pronounced a blessing both before and after, and R. Hiyya bar Ba stared. “Babylonian, why are you looking at me? Don’t you know that the seven species require a blessing before and after?”<sup>75</sup>

The salutation is not necessarily condescending. R. Yohanan used it in expressing the debt of Palestinian Jewry for two ritual practices whose description originated with the Babylonians. “R. Yohanan said to R. Hiyya bar Ba: ‘Babylonian, two customs came up [to Eretz Yisrael] in your hands, prostrating on fast days, and willow [used on the seventh day of Sukkot]’.”<sup>76</sup> It is this statement which stands behind the enigmatic dictum at bSukka: אמר ר' יוחנן דילכון אמר דלהון היא, meaning: “[O Babylonians], your sages say it [= willow] is theirs.”<sup>77</sup>

By transferring this phrase to Bava Qamma and using it to seal the entire novella, it takes on a completely new meaning; namely, that R. Yohanan owed his understanding of the most difficult halakhic issues to the brief tutorial provided by Rav Kahana, and that is why R. Yohanan regularly credited the Babylonians sages in all his teaching, opening with the formula, “Your [sages] say ...”<sup>78</sup>

## 5

In our discussion of phrases and themes appearing both in the Rav Kahana vignette and elsewhere in the Bavli, we have largely dwelt upon the R. Yohanan/Resh Laqish saga at bBava Mešia 84a, which, in our opinion served as its main literary source.<sup>79</sup> Besides the reasons mentioned above for this determination, it must be added that the Babylonian R. Yohanan / Resh Laqish saga is itself a

<sup>75</sup> yBerahkot vi, 10a (בבליא למה את מסתכל בי). Cf. yMaasrot end, v. 52a.

<sup>76</sup> ySheviit i, 33b; ySukka iv, 54b; yAvoda Zara iv, 43d.

<sup>77</sup> Friedman, pp. 163–164.

<sup>78</sup> Cf. Sperber, p. 97 (160). An additional secondary usage of the idiom דילכון is ascribed to R. Yohanan at bGittin 84b. Regarding the possible relationship there to an opinion of Rav Kahana, see my *Commentary to Gittin IX*, Society for the Interpretation of the Talmud (forthcoming).

<sup>79</sup> Schremer left the relationship of originality and dependency between these two passages an open question (pp. 411–12, 415 n. 47).

reworking of a Palestinian aggada regarding these two scholars, which portrays R. Yohanan's abject disorientation at Resh Laqish's absence.

*pHorayot iii, 47a*

רשב"ל אמי נשיא שחטא מלקין אותו  
בבית דין של שלשה מה מחזרין ליה א"ר  
חגי מושב דינן מחזרין ליה דו קטלון  
ליה.

שמע ר' יודה נשיא וכעס שלח נותין  
למיתפוס ית רשב"ל, וערק ברא דמונדלא,  
ואית דאמרין בדה דכפר חיטיא.

סליק רבי יוחנן לבית וועדא סליק רבי  
יודה נשיא לבית וועדא. אמר ליה למה  
לית מרי אמר לן מילה דאורייתא. שרי  
טפח בחדא ידיה. אמר ליה ובחדא ידא  
טפחין, אמר ליה לאו, אין לא בן לקיש  
לא אמר ליה, לא אמי ליה. ואנו מפתחא  
אמר ליה ברא דמונדלא אמר ליה אנא  
ואת נפיק לקדמיה.

שלח רבי יוחנן נבי רבי שמעון בן לקיש  
עתיר לך מילה דאורייתא דנשיא נפיק  
לקדמך.

נפק לקדמון מר דינמא דידכון דמיא  
לבריייתבון, כד אחא רחמנא למיפרוק  
ישראל ממצרים לא שלח לא שליח ולא  
מלאך אלא הקב"ה בעצמו דכת"י ועברתי  
בארץ מצרי' בלילה הזה, ולא עוד אלא  
הוא וכל דורגון דידיה, אשר הלך אלהים  
אין כתיב כאן, אלא אשר הלכו אלהים.

אמרין ליה מה חמיתה מימור לן הדא  
מילתא, אמר לון מה אתון סברין מי  
דחיל מינכון הוינא מנע אולפניה  
דרחמנא. אמר רב שמואל בר רב יצחק  
אל בניי כי לא טובה השמועה ונני  
מעבירם עם יי מעבירין אותו.

*pSanhedrin ii, 19d<sup>80</sup>*

וריש לקיש אמר נשיא שחטא מלקין  
אותו בבית דין של שלשה. מה מחזרין ליה  
אמר רבי חגי משה<sup>81</sup> אין מחזרין ליה די  
קטל לון.

שמע רבי יודן נשיא וכעס. שלח נתון  
למיתפוס לריש לקיש. טרפון. ערק לרא  
דמונדלא, ואית דמרין להרא כפר חיטיא.

למחר סליק רבי יוחנן לבית וועדא וסליק  
ר' יודן נשיא לבית וועדא. אמר ליה למה  
לית מרי אמר לן מילה דאורייתא. שרי  
טפח בחדא ידיה. אמר ליה ובחדא  
טפחין, אלא אמר ליה לא ולא בן לקיש  
לא אמר ליה אלא אני מפתחה אמר ליה  
בהרא מגדלא אמר ליה למחר אנא ואת  
ניפוק לקדמיה.

שלח רבי יוחנן נבי ריש לקיש עתיר לך  
מילה דאורייתא דנשיא נפיק לקדמך.

נפק לקדמון ומר דינמא דידכון דמיא  
לבריייתבון, כד אחא רחמנא למיפרוק  
ית ישראל לא שלח לא שליח ולא מלאך  
אלא הוא בעצמו דכתיב ועברתי בארץ  
מצרים הוא וכל דורגון דידיה.

אמר ליה ומה חמית מימר הא מילתא  
אמר לון מה אתון סברין מה דחיל מינכון  
הוינא מנע אולפניה דרחמנא דמר רבי  
שמואל בר רב יצחק אל בניי כי לא טובה  
השמועה

Resh Laqish taught a law concerning the flogging of an errant patriarch, and was forced into hiding by the wrath of the Patriarch, R. Yehuda Nesia. In his absence, R. Yohanan was unable to function. When the Patriarch asked R. Yohanan to teach the words of

<sup>80</sup> Cf. L. Ginzberg (ed.), *Yerushalmi Fragments*, New York 1909, p. 257.

<sup>81</sup> An oath. Correct phraseology in Horayot accordingly.

Torah, he clapped with one hand, signifying that without Resh Laqish, he was unable to teach.

By contrast, Resh Laqish exhibits exceptional bravery and broaches no equivocation when questioned. He will not compromise his principle that the teaching of Torah should not be withheld, even in the face of personal danger. "Do you think I am afraid of you?"

Thus Resh Laqish's bravery<sup>82</sup> and R. Yohanan's dependence upon him, as described in the Yerushalmi, were among the literary building blocks in the construction of the lengthy, late saga at bBava Mešia 84a, which itself served as a source for the Rav Kahana narrative.

The dependency of the Rav Kahana narrative upon its sources in bBava Mešia is thus marked by two aspects:

(1) material which originated in Palestinian sources reaches this passage via other Babylonian passages (lion and fox; serpent).

(2) language and themes from both strands of the Bava Mešia cycle (R. Yohanan and Resh Laqish / R. Elazar b. R. Shimon) are woven together in the Rav Kahana narrative, indicating that the compiler of the Rav Kahana vignette already had the Bava Mešia material before him in its present form.

The second act is thus exceptional in Babylonian *aggada* being a reworking of another entire Babylonian narrative. At the same time however, it would appear that this act also draws upon and reworks primary Palestinian sources regarding Rav Kahana! Indeed, this scholar's meeting Resh Laqish in a Palestinian *yeshiva* and besting him with a flourish appears in yKilaim i 6, 27a:<sup>83</sup>

ר' אחא בשם ריש לקיש כל שכתוב בו למינהו כלאים נוהג בו התיב כהנא הרי חיית  
הים הרי כתיב בהן למינהו מעתה כלאים בהן אמי ר' יוסי בירי בון הכא פרס כהנא  
מצודתיה על ריש לקיש וצדייה.

With a question regarding sea creatures, Rav Kahana ensnared Resh Laqish in his net.

## 6

Act II contains several technical phrases describing institutions or procedures of the *yeshiva*. Fundamentalist readings of this passage have taken these as documentation of the Palestinian *yeshiva* in Tiberias presided over by R. Yohanan. This approach was already corrected by W. Bacher, who posited that the language of this Babylonian composition can only reflect the reality of the

<sup>82</sup> Cf. yTerumot viii 10, 46b.

<sup>83</sup> Cf. Bereshit Rabba, 7, p. 53.

<sup>84</sup> REJ 44 (1902), p. 147, in critique of I. Halevy, *Dorot Harischoanim* (cf. D. Goodblatt, *Rabbinic Instruction in Sasanian Babylonia*, Leiden 1975, p. 254; Gafni, "Yeshiva", p. 292).

Babylonian Yeshiva.<sup>84</sup> When Gafni discovered two textual types of this story, with the technical terms missing in the shorter one, he determined that these terms are part of the "Babylonian additions" that accrued to a shorter and more original version of this story, leaving open the possibility that the story itself is essentially Palestinian,<sup>85</sup> and the terms derive from the reality of Amoraic Babylonia.<sup>86</sup> The other possibility which has been raised is that the "Babylonian additions" found in the longer version derive from the geonic period.<sup>87</sup> Quite independent of the textual question,<sup>88</sup> it is possible that the terms themselves betray a post-Amoraic, (even geonic?) *Sitz im Leben*. Scholars have already compared these terms to geonic usage, but refrained from drawing the conclusion that they are post-Amoraic. However, in light of the analysis of the entire composition indicating its post-Amoraic character, the close correspondence of these terms to geonic language, and their rarity or absence in clear Amoraic passages now allow adding vocabulary and linguistic usage to the features supporting post-Amoraic origin. These institutions are summarized below.

(1) מסיים מתיבתא דיומא לרבנן, מתיבתא דלמחר

*Metivta* in the sense of "lesson", "a unit of text studied at a specific session" is common in geonic material, but rare or absent in regular Amoraic diction.<sup>89</sup> The construction "lesson of X" (-ד + מתיבתא) as quoted above<sup>90</sup> is noteworthy.<sup>91</sup>

The technical use of SYM in the sense of "summarize", "edit"<sup>92</sup> is clearer in this passage than in any other in the Bavli, and its use with a unit of text as direct object of the verb, further clarifying the literary function of this operation, is quite unique in the Bavli.<sup>93</sup> The רבנן for whom Resh Laqish performed this

<sup>84</sup> P. 299 end; cf. p. 296, n. 27; *History*, p. 194, 196. See Goodblatt, p. 256.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 239, 299; *History*, p. 196; cf. Schremer's analysis, p. 414, n. 44.

<sup>86</sup> See Gafni, p. 301, *History*, p. 196; D. Rosenthal, "Addenda to the Talmudic Dictionary (III): ארזניג (*arzānig*)", *Tarbiz*, 61 (1992), p. 224, n. 28; Schremer, pp. 413–414.

<sup>87</sup> See below.

<sup>88</sup> See V. Aptovitzer, "Sefer Hefetz and Sefer M'thiboth", *Tarbiz*, 4 (1933) p. 151, n. 41; E.S. Rosenthal, "A Contribution to the Talmudic Lexicon" (Hebrew), *Tarbiz*, 40 (1971), pp. 193–196; pp. 76–79; Gafni, "Yeshiva", p. 295.

<sup>89</sup> In MS Hamburg 165 הא' מתיבתא דתני דא' דנא (the lesson that was just taught" (see below).

<sup>90</sup> The only other examples are in bGittin 68a מתיבתא וגמר לרקיע וגמר סליק לרקיע (cf. I. Gafni ("Yeshiva and Metivta", *Zion*, 43 [1978], p. 28, n. 76). This is an aggadah about Ashmedai containing magical overtones, and the language can hardly be taken as representative Amoraic diction. It plays on מתיבתא meaning "the academy on high" in light of מתיבתא meaning lesson of text, thus: the lesson studied on high, the lesson studied below.

<sup>91</sup> See Sh. Z. Havlin, "Al HaHatima HaSifrutit" (Hebrew), *Researches in Talmudic Literature ... in Honour of the Eightieth Birthday of Saul Lieberman*, Jerusalem, 1983, p. 159 and n. 53; P. Mandel, "Sayyem" (forthcoming); Gafni, "Yeshiva", p. 294 and n. 17.

<sup>92</sup> See Bereshit Rabbah, 70, pp. 807–08 and notes there (= a geonic gloss?).

function are disciples, equivalent to the רבנן דסיומא, well known from geonic sources.<sup>94</sup> Resh Laqish summarized the lesson taught by R. Yohanan,<sup>95</sup> and gave it a literary form.<sup>96</sup>

(2) אותבה בדרא קמא

Twice<sup>97</sup> Rav Kahana was seated in the venerated "first row". דרא קמא, mentioned twice in this passage, is otherwise unknown in the Bavli. However, it appears in exactly this form in R. Natan HaBavli's famous description of the geonic yeshiva<sup>98</sup>: ראש ישיבתם. ראש ישיבה עומד בראש ולפניו עשרה אנשים: וזה סדר ישיבתם. ויהיא נקראת דרא קמא

(3) שבע דרי

"Seven Rows" are also an essential feature of the geonic yeshiva described by R. Natan HaBavli.<sup>100</sup> It has been asserted that neither the Palestinian *yeshiva*<sup>101</sup> nor the Babylonian *yeshiva*<sup>102</sup> of Amoraic times was arranged in seven

<sup>94</sup> D. Rosenthal, "Rabbanan de'Siyyum'a (רבנן דסיומא) and Bene Siyyume (בני סיומא)" (Hebrew), *Tarbiz*, 49 (1980), English summary, p. v, pp. 56–57 (but cf. p. 61); Danzig, *Introduction to Halakhot Pesuqot*, New York and Jerusalem 1993, p. 165.

<sup>95</sup> In *Devarim Rabbah*, Lieberman edition, which is not earlier than the Tanhuma literature (p. xxiii), Moses in his last days is pictured as agreeing to be Joshua's disciple, and attending a session taught by him, after which the people say: "Moses, 'edit' the Torah for us" (p. 41 and n. 8). In the light of our sugya, this should be taken to mean that Moses was called upon to summarize the lesson taught by Joshua in the session which had just ended. Lieberman came to a similar conclusion based on other considerations (p. 140, n. 2), which he supported by the free rendition in *Se'ena uR'ena*: ראש ישיבה עומד בראש ולפניו עשרה אנשים: וזה סדר ישיבתם. ויהיא נקראת דרא קמא

<sup>96</sup> Babylonian סיים is a general semantic equivalent of Palestinian חתם (See W. Bacher, *Die exegetische Terminologie der jüdischen Traditionsliteratur* II, Leipzig 1905, pp. 137–139), which described a technical function in the Palestinian yeshiva: רבי חנינה פתח רבי יוחנן וריש לקיש חותמין רבי בא בר זבדא פתח רבי יסא ורבי אמי חותמין רבי חני פתח רבי יונה ורבי יוסי חותמין (ySanhedrin I, 18c; yRosh HaShana ii 6, 58b; cf. Lieberman *ibid.*, p. 136). There is no reason, however, to assume that its exact content was identical with that of the Babylonian סיים. The Palestinian traditions that R. Yohanan and Resh Laqish "closed" the sessions of R. Hanina's yeshiva most probably belong to the literary kernel of the position of Resh Laqish described at bBava Qamma 117a in pure geonic Babylonian terminology.

<sup>97</sup> See below.

<sup>98</sup> On which, see R. Brody, *The Geonim*, pp. 26–30.

<sup>99</sup> Ad. Neubauer (editor), *Mediaeval Jewish Chronicles*, Oxford 1895, p. 87; Gafni, "Yeshiva", p. 295; Schremer, p. 406, nn. 14, 15. This terminology is part of the Arabic original of R. Natan's Epistle: דארה קמא (M. Ben Sasson, "Structure, Purpose and Content of R. Natan HaBavli's Work" (Hebrew), in ed. R. Bonfil, *Culture and Society in Medieval Jewish History* (Hebrew), Jerusalem 1989, p. 194.

<sup>100</sup> In the Arabic original: ... (Ben Sasson, p. 195). The line reads in Hebrew translation: ויהיה ראוי לאחד מן הדארי, ויהיה בו במקצת לאחד משבעה דארי, היה בו במקצת

<sup>101</sup> Sperber, p. 89 (152); Gafni, "Yeshiva", p. 296.

<sup>102</sup> Goodblatt, p. 256. Goodblatt does not wish to use our passage or bMenahot 29b as evidence of Amoraic Babylonia (pp. 254–55) and takes them "at face value as reflecting conditions in Palestine" (p. 256). On comparing the number or rows mentioned in these two passages, see E.S. Rosenthal, "Tradition and Innovation in the *Halakha* of the Sages"

rows. Clearly the description in our passage derives from the reality of the geonic yeshivot.<sup>103</sup>

Regarding the two textual traditions of the Rav Kahana episode, we have attempted to demonstrate in a separate study<sup>104</sup> that the longer version is the original Babylonian composition, and the shorter is a later condensation designed, among other things, to eliminate aspects of the narrative which portray R. Yohanan in a less than positive light. Indeed, the polished and artful literary style,<sup>105</sup> and its central theme of demotion through seven rows setting aside the prohibition of seven years, could hardly have been achieved through marginal glossing. This conclusion reestablishes Sperber's essential position of the artistic unity, and consequently late composition of the narrative in its entirety.

## 7

In sum, the Rav Kahana narrative provides a rare opportunity to trace the processes of composition and the thematic aims of a developed and artistic late Babylonian aggada.

Each of the three acts contains a Palestinian literary kernel.

Act I: Rav Kahana rashly causes the death of antagonists and suffers remorse, causing him to flee (yBrakhot) > Rav Kahana rashly executes the informer and flees.

Act II: Rav Kahana posing a question for which Resh Laqish has no answer and thus "ensnares and captures him" (yKilaim) > Rav Kahana demonstrates his virtuosity in talmudic dialectic, and Resh Laqish declares him "a lion". Rav Kahana appears before R. Yohanan ignominiously (yBerakhot) > a more victorious appearance.

Act III: The first Rav Kahana is a revered teacher who answers the question raised by R. Yohanan and Resh Laqish (yRosh HaShana, etc.) > the second Rav Kahana converts R. Yohanan into his disciple, and solves all R. Yohanan's outstanding problems.

(Hebrew), *Tarbiz*, 63 (1994), p. 349, n. 71. The developed aggada regarding Moses and R. Akiva at bMenahot 29b ascribed to Rav Yehuda in the name of Rav deserves separate attention.

<sup>103</sup> On this discussion of the *yeshivot* I must add reference to Rubenstein's detailed treatment, pp. 270–272, 396–400; see now also J.L. Rubenstein, "The Rise of the Babylonian Rabbinic Academy: A Reexamination of the Talmudic Evidence", *Jewish Studies, an Internet Journal* 1 (2002), pp. 55–68.

<sup>104</sup> Lecture delivered at the Thirteenth World Congress of Jewish Studies, Jerusalem, 2001. See "The Textual Traditions of the Narrative concerning Rav Kahana at bBava Qamma 117 a–b" (Hebrew), *Jubilee Volume in Honor of Professor Meyer S. Feldblum* (forthcoming).

<sup>105</sup> "For our story-teller has constructed his tale act by act, scene by scene, building it up by progressive stages, each culminating with its own climax ... a passage built up with subtle art and artifice" (Sperber, pp. 96–97 [160]).

Similarly, the narrative is replete with secondary usage of motifs and phraseology found elsewhere in the Bavli.

Act I: An antagonist is killed in Rav's presence when a bone strikes his windpipe (bYoma).

Act II is essentially a reworking of the R. Yohanan / Resh Laqish narrative in bBava Mešia, also drawing on adjacent material there. The disturbing development of events there, where R. Yohanan loses his temper, bringing about the death of R. Laqish, is "corrected" in the Bava Qamma account where R. Yohanan revives Rav Kahana, who befell a fate similar to that of Resh Laqish. By introducing Rav Kahana in place of Resh Laqish, the central scene of the narrative brings together two figures each known independently for his death-dealing powers, and pits them against each other in a dialectic engagement.

In that the Bava Mešia material has its own (Palestinian) antecedents, we can trace developments of themes through multiple stages:

R. Yohanan is disoriented as a result of Resh Laqish's absence (ySanhedrin/ Horayot) > "Where are you bar Laqisha" (bBava Mešia) > "Where is bar Laqisha" (bBava Qamma).

Act III: The occurrence elsewhere in the Bavli of R. Yohanan's statement "Your [Babylonian] sage has said" creates the occasion for a teleological explanation of that statement – R. Yohanan derived an important part of his torah-learning from the Babylonian virtuoso, Rav Kahana, and consequently referred to his indebtedness frequently.

The artistic symmetry of the long narrative marks it as a unified composition. Its literary dependency upon another late Babylonian aggada and secondary usage of many existing aggadic passages, combined with detailed and explicate mention of institutions recorded essentially in the geonic period, suggest that the literary origins hark to that era. This is all the more strengthened by the basic polemic undercurrent, reminiscent of the stand of the geonic Pirqoi ben Baboi. The Rav Kahana narrative provides this position with an elegant pseudo-historical hagiography.

# The Talmud Yerushalmi and Graeco-Roman Culture

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