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The Talmud of Babylonia

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This paper charts the appearance of a notion that, despite mutual participation in a shared endeavor of rabbinic study, Babylonian rabbis and ultimately Babylonian rabbinic learning came to be thought of as distinct from Palestinian rabbis and Palestinian rabbinic learning.[1] I trace how this development is largely preserved within the Babylonian Talmud, yet, in material attributed to rabbis living in Palestine. I consider how the awareness of a distinctly Babylonian rabbinic scholastic project primarily unfolded within the self-reflective space of Babylonian rabbinic culture, as it contrasted itself with the sister rabbinic community in the Land of Israel. I then focus on a remarkable Talmudic source from this set of texts which describes the composition of the Babylonian rabbinic endeavor, called simply "Babylonia," as a mixture of Scripture, Mishnah, and *talmud*, while an immediately adjacent teaching refers to the "*talmud* of

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1 The last decades have seen considerable research examining the relationship between the Babylonian and Palestinian Talmuds. See especially Yaakov Sussman, "Again Concerning Yerushalmi Neziqin," in *Mehqerei Talmud*, eds. David Rosenthal and Yaakov Sussman (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1990), pp. 55–133; Christine Elizabeth Hayes, *Between the Babylonian and Palestinian Talmuds: Accounting for Halakhic Difference in Selected Sugyot from Tractate Avodah Zarah* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); and Alyssa M. Gray, *A Talmud in Exile: The Influence of Yerushalmi Avodah Zarah on the Formation of Bavli Avodah Zarah* (Providence: Program in Judaic Studies, Brown University, 2005). This paper focuses on the particular question of how classical Palestinian and Babylonian rabbinic texts *themselves* treat the two scholastic projects of rabbinic Palestine and Babylonia.

Babylonia."[2] I suggest that this teaching developed from earlier precursors, dates to a relatively late point in the Talmudic era, and perhaps, in its final form, is the work of post-amoraic sages who thought that the principle of anthological "mixing" was central to the identity of the rabbinic discourse, or *talmud*, of Babylonia—a discourse that would ultimately crystalize into the Babylonian Talmud as we know it.

From Local Invective to Collective Criticism

Unlike tannaitic literature, which is largely uninterested in the geographic origins of its traditions, in amoraic literature rabbinic teachings are regularly marked by geographic coordinates.[3] Rabbis are shown traveling beyond their haunts, absorbing traditions previously unknown to them, bringing these traditions back to local networks, and reflecting on the geographic aspect of their discovery. Sages, both as collectives and as individuals, are sometimes associated with specific places, and those associations are occasionally brought up in discussion. In this way we hear of the rabbis of the South (that is, Southern Judea), Caesarea, Pumbedita, Nehardea, Sura, and other locales, claiming positions in rabbinic debate, as well as the "West," in the Bavli generally meaning Palestine, and "there" (*taman*; *hatam*)—which, depending on the perspective of the compilation or speaker, refers to Babylonia or Palestine. Likewise, individual sages identified by toponyms are sometimes judged, as it were, on geographic grounds, such as Rabbi Simlai of Lydda whose words were to be disregarded since "the people of Lydda are scoffers" (b. Avodah Zarah 36a).

In general, Palestinian rabbinic texts register criticism of this sort on an ad hominem basis and local plane. Notably, these criticisms do not consign to rabbinic Babylonia the unique, collective scholastic identity by

2 In this paper I italicize "*talmud*" and keep it in the lower-case when referring to a form of rabbinic *discourse* that goes by this name. "Talmud" is reserved for the compilation known as the Talmud as it has come down to us since the early Middle Ages. The complex relationship between *talmud* the discourse and Talmud the textual artifact, and the difficulty in distinguishing between the two, is discussed below. I intend to treat the issue at still greater length in future publications.

3 Moulie Vidas, "A Place of Torah," in *Talmudic Transgressions: Engaging the Work of Daniel Boyarin*, eds. Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2017), pp. 23–73.

which it would later become known. For example, on more than one occasion, the leading third-century amora, R. Yohanan, expresses frustration with specific Babylonian scholars by first exclaiming "Babylonian!" before proceeding with his argument.[4] In an especially memorable exchange, R. Yohanan draws a connection between the slowness of a certain student and his Babylonian origins:

> Genesis Rabbah 38:11 (ed. Theodor-Albeck, pp. 360-361)[5]
>
> "על כן קרא שמה בבל כי שם בלל ייי"
> חד מן תלמידוהי דר' יוחנן הוה יתיב קדמוי. הוה מסבר ליה ולא סבר. אמר למה לית את סבר? אמר ליה: דאנא גלי מן אתרי. אמר ליה: מן היידין את? אמר ליה: מן בור־סיף. אמר ליה: לא תאמר כן, אלא מן בולסיף! "כי שם בלל ייי שפת כל הארץ".
>
> "That is why it was called Babel, because there the Lord mixed up…" (Genesis 11:9).
> One of R. Yoḥanan's students was sitting in front of him. [R. Yoḥanan] would explain [the material] to him, yet he did not understand. [R. Yoḥanan] exclaimed: "Why do you not understand?! He responded: Because I was exiled from my place. He said to him: Where are you from? He responded: From Bor-Sif. [R. Yoḥanan] said to him: Do not say that, rather from "Bul-Sif!"—"because there the Lord mixed up (*balal*) the language (*sefat*) of the whole earth."

Rabbi Yoḥanan is not sympathetic to his student's learning difficulties, and he is unsatisfied with the justification that this disability can be attributed to a life led as an exile. Actually, Rabbi Yoḥanan puns, the pupil's confusion stems from his origins in Borsippa, an ancient site marked by a

4 See y. Berakhot 6:1 (10a); y. Shvi'it 1:5 (33b)// y. Sukkah 4:1 (54b); y. Ma'asrot 5:3 (52a); and y. Shabbat 7:2 (9a). The interpretation of some of these passages is difficult, yet in all of them R. Yoḥanan appears to be critical of his interlocutor.

5 Unless indicated otherwise, rabbinic texts quoted in this paper are based on the transcription of the manuscript chosen by the Historical Dictionary Project of the Academy of the Hebrew Language, with punctuation added, abbreviations expanded, and variants noted as needed.

ziggurat traditionally believed to be the remnants of the Tower of Babel.[6] Cleverly, R. Yoḥanan suggests an etymology of "Borsif," slightly recalibrated as "Bul-Sif" and linked to Genesis' own folk-etymology for Babylon: "That is why it was called Babel, because there the Lord mixed up (*balal*) the language (*sefat*) of the whole earth" (Genesis 11:9).

R. Yoḥanan's negative reaction to this Babylonian rabbi, and other Babylonians in other sources, is curious in light of passages that remember him as a magnet for Babylonian sages coming to study in Palestine.[7] At the same time, the negativity in the exchange lines up with other sources that attest to ongoing competition and sometimes animosity between Palestinian and Babylonian sages[8]—primarily *by* Palestinians *about* specific Babylonians and not vice versa.[9] Some of these passages directly criticize Babylonian learning prowess, as when the Bavli records a recurring Palestinian slur voiced by recent Babylonian immigrants there

6 Borsippa is proximate to the ruins of ancient Babylon with which it was widely associated. See b. Shabbat 36a: "Rav Ashi said: We too say Borsippa is Babylon and Babylon is Borsippa!" See Aharon Oppenheimer, *Babylonia Judaica in the Talmudic Period* (Wiesbaden: L. Reichert, 1983), pp. 100-104.

7 Aharon Oppenheimer, *Between Rome and Babylon: Studies in Jewish Leadership and Society* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), pp. 417-432, with references to earlier research.

8 See for example, Isaiah Gafni, "How Babylonia Became 'Zion': Shifting Identities in Late Antiquity," in *Jewish Identities in Antiquity: Studies in Memory of Menahem Stern*, eds. Lee I. Levine and Daniel R. Schwartz (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), pp. 333–48; Jeffrey L. Rubenstein, *The Culture of the Babylonian Talmud* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), pp. 39-53; Catherine Hezser, *Jewish Travel in Antiquity* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), pp. 354-357; and Christine Elizabeth Hayes, "'In the West, They Laughed at Him,' The Mocking Realists of the Babylonian Talmud," *Journal of Law, Religion and State* 2 (2013): 137–67.

9 In one tradition, Palestinians go as far as blaming the Babylonian rabbis for the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple. See especially Canticles Rabbah 8:10, *pisqah* 3. At the same time, Babylonians insultingly doubt the relative virtue of the Palestinians' lineage, for which see b. Qiddushin 71a // b. Ketubot 111a: "The Land of Israel is dough [compared] to Babylonia." Perhaps in response to this sort of claim, the second-generation Palestinian amora, Reish Laqish, who is closely linked to R. Yoḥanan, is recorded as sarcastically remarking "were someone to tell me that there is a chronicle (*divrei ha-yamim*) in Babylonia, behold I would go and bring it from there" (y. Sanhedrin 10:1; 28a).

about "stupid Babylonians."[10] But it is remarkable that only in passages found in the Bavli do we find such collective disparagement of Babylonian sages by their Palestinians colleagues. In this way we first encounter the collectivized terminology, "the sages of Babylonia" (*talmidei ḥakhamim she-ve-bavel*) who, so we are told, "hate one another" (b. Pesaḥim 112b), in contrast to the "sages of the Land of Israel (*talmidei ḥakhamim she-ve-eretz yisrael*) who treat each other pleasantly…[and] graciously in *halakhah*" (b. Sanhedrin 24a).[11] In Palestinian sources, on the other hand, criticism of Babylonian rabbis and their learning is neither magnified nor collectivized. Instead, it tends to take a personal and local cast, as we saw with R. Yoḥanan and his student.[12]

Babylonian Learning and Babylonian Space

If R. Yoḥanan is the best-known Palestinian teacher of Babylonian rabbis who came to study in the Land of Israel, R. Zeira is the best-known student of this group. The story of R. Zeira's immigration to Palestine from Babylonia beginning with its preparatory stages, continuing with the

10 b. Pesahim 34a; b. Yoma 57a; b. Zevaḥim 60b; b. Menaḥot 52a; and b. Bekhorot 25b. Additionally, R. Yirmiyah refers to the teachings of Babylonian sages as "dark" on a couple of occasions (b. Pesahim 34b, responding to a tradition taught by Ravin; and b. Yoma 57a, responding to Rava's teaching). We will consider another reference of R. Yirmiyah to the "darkness" of Babylonian rabbinic learning, below.

11 The only possible exception in a Palestinian work where Babylonian learning is collectively disparaged is the following, rather difficult-to-discern rabbinic folk etymology about Shinar, in Southern Mesopotamia:
Genesis Rabbah 37:4 (ed. Theodor-Albeck p. 346)
שנער – ששריה מביטים בתורה עד שהן נערים.
Shinar – that her princes gaze at the Torah only while in their youth.
However, the meaning of the line is unclear and other versions of this tradition, such as those found at y. Berakhot (4:1; 7c) and Ecclesiastes Rabbah 12:7, record variants, such as "her princes die while youths" (ששריה מתים נערים), which have nothing to do with Torah study. Note, however, Lamentations Rabbah, *petiḥta* 23, which records "Her princes reject the Torah" (ששריה מבעטים בתורה). Regardless, even these traditions seem not to conceive of Babylonian rabbinic learning as a collective (and problematic) endeavor, rather they criticize a general laxity and unwillingness to learn Torah among (Southern?) Mesopotamian Jews.

12 This is also apparent in y. Pesaḥim 5:3 (32a), where R. Simlai is presented as hailing from two *specific* places (rather than all of Babylonia) that were seen as problematic, namely, the Mesopotamian town of Nehardea and Southern Judea, which included Lydda.

journey to the Holy Land, and concluding with the trials and tribulations of living there as a Babylonian immigrant, is colorfully depicted across classical rabbinic literature, including in the Bavli and in Palestinian compilations.[13] Once again, it is specifically in the Bavli that Babylonian learning is depicted as a collective project, one which is spatially distinct from Palestinian learning, and in the view attributed to R. Zeira, negatively so. In one passage we are told that R. Zeira undertook an arduous set of fasts in order to erase his Babylonian rabbinic education and embark with a fresh slate on a new scholastic career in the Land of Israel:

b. Bava Metzia 85a

רבי זורא[14] [15] יתי [16] ארבעין[17] תעניאתא דנישתכח[18] תלמודא דבבל[19] מיניה.

13 An early, influential study is Abraham Goldberg, "Rabbi Ze'ira and Babylonian Custom in Palestine," *Tarbiẓ* 36 (1967): 319–41. For a recent dissertation chapter on the cycle, with copious references to prior scholarship, see Tamar Duvdevani, "Literary Aspects of Rabbinic Attributions in the Babylonian Talmud" (Hebrew; New York, Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion, 2018), pp. 110-145. Still more recent writing on the R. Zeira stories can be found in Reuven Kiperwasser, "Narrating the Self: Tales of Rabbi Zeira's Arrival to the Land of Israel," in *Self, Self-Fashioning, and Individuality in Late Antiquity*, eds. Maren R. Niehoff and Joshua Levinson (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019), pp. 353–74 and Reuven Kiperwasser, *Going West: Migrating Personae and Construction of the Self in Rabbinic Culture* (Providence: Brown Judaic Studies, 2021). Scholars who have studied the immigration of Babylonian rabbis to Palestine, such as Joshua Schwartz and Catherine Hezser, have also devoted research to the R. Zeira tales. See Joshua Schwartz, "The Patriotic Rabbi: Babylonian Scholars in Roman Period Palestine," in eds. Siân Jones and Sarah Pearce eds, *Jewish Local Patriotism and Self-Identification in the Graeco-Roman Period* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), pp. 118-31, which also references the author's earlier work; and Hezser, *Jewish Travel in Antiquity*.

14 **זורא**] MS Oxford; others **זירא**; MS Florence: **רב** with the **ב** marked for deletion and **זירא** added.

15 MS Vatican 115א and printed editions add **כי סליק לארעא דישראל**.

16 MS Escorial adds: **מאה ועשרין תעניית׳**.

17 **ארבעין**] MSS Oxford and Escorial; MS Florence omits **יתיב בתעניתא**; **מאה**] all others.

18 **דנישתכח**] MS Oxford; **דנשתכח**] MSS Vatican 115, Munich 95; **דישתכח**] MS Hamburg; **דנשכח**] MS Escorial; **דלשכח**] printed edition; **דמשכח**] MS Vatican 117 and Cremona binding fragment. MS Florence originally recorded **דלא ישתכח**, but then it struck out the **דלא** and added a **ד** to **ישתכח**.

19 **דבבל**] All MSS (MS Florence: **דב!בבל**); **דבבלאה**] printed editions.

> R. Zeira fasted forty fasts so that the learning (*talmuda*) of Babylonia should be forgotten from him.

To be sure, the Yerushalmi also remembers R. Zeira's extreme fasting.[20] However, only in the Bavli is R. Zeira's fasting connected to immigration to the Land of Israel,[21] and only in the Bavli is it linked to forgetting the learning associated with Babylonia.

In a similar vein, another Talmudic source shows R. Zeira reflecting on the scholastic clarity that had evaded him in Babylonia, and which he finally gained when he immigrated to the Land of Israel. Although, in this case, Babylonian learning is not explicitly conceived of as distinct from that of the Land of Israel, the upshot of the tradition seems to be the contrast of these two geo-scholastic entities:

b. Bava Batra 158b

"נפל הבית עליו ועל אמו וכו'"[22] בחזקת מי?
ר' אלעא[23] אמר: בחזקת יורשי האם.[24] ור' זירא אמר: בחזקת יורשי הבן[25].

20 y. Ta'anit 2:8 (76a) // y. Nedarim 8:1 (40d):
ר' זעורה צם תלת מאוון צומין, ואית דאמרי תשע מאוון, ולא חש למגילת תענית.
R. Ze'orah fasted three hundred fasts – there are those who say nine hundred – and he was not concerned for the Scroll of Fasts (an ancient Jewish calendar of dates on which fasting was prohibited).
Note that the spelling of the sage's name as Ze'orah in this Palestinian source parallels the form of the name in MS Oxford of the Bavli passage: זורא.

21 While this can be inferred from the content of the Bavli passage, it is fully explicated in some witnesses. See n. 15.

22 **נפל הבית עליו ועל אמו**] MS Florence and ed. Pesaro juxtapose our passage to the previous Mishnah (m. Bava Batra 9:9) concerning a house that collapsed on a husband and wife and it is unknown who died first.

23 **אלעא**] MSS Hamburg and Escorial, also secondary witnesses like Alfasi, Isaiah di Trani, and Asher ben Yehiel; **אילי**] MS Munich; **אלעאי]** MS Paris; **אילא**] printed editions and Vatican 115; **אליעזי**] MS Florence.

24 **האם**] almost all witnesses; **הבעל**] MS Florence and ed. Pesaro (see n. 22); MS Vatican 115ב and the Munich binding fragment initially, before the term was deleted and replaced with **האם**.

25 **הבן**] almost all witnesses; **האשה**] MS Florence and ed. Pesaro (see n. 22); MS Vatican 115ב and the Munich binding fragment initially, before the term was deleted and replaced with **הבן**.

כי סליק ר' זירא[26] קם בשטתיה דר' אלעא[27] וקם רבא[28] בשטתיה דר' זירא.[29]
אמר ר' זירא: שמע מינה[30] אוירא דארץ־ישראל[31] מחכים.

> "If the house collapsed upon a son and his mother [and it is unknown who died first (with implications for inheritance law) … Rabbi Aqiva said: In this case I concede that the property retains its previous possession]" (m. Bava Batra 9:10).
> In whose possession [does it remain]?
> Rabbi Il'a says: In the possession of the mother's heirs.
> Rabbi Zeira said: In the possession of the son's heirs.
> When Rabbi Zeira ascended [to the Land of Israel] he adopted the opinion of Rabbi Il'a; and Rava adopted the opinion of Rabbi Zeira.
> Rabbi Zeira said: Conclude from this that the airspace (*avira*) of the Land of Israel makes one wise.

According to this passage, while R. Zeira was in Babylonia he held what was in his later view an erroneous opinion in inheritance law. Only upon relocating to the more intellectually propitious Land of Israel, where the Palestinian Rabbi Il'a had ruled correctly on the case, did R. Zeira come around to adopting the right ruling. Notably, the passage as we now have it[32] further underlines the relationship between the learning associated with

26 **זירא**] almost all witnesses; **אלעזר**(!)]ed. Venice.

27 **אלעא**] MS Hamburg; **איל'**] MS Munich; **אלעאי]** MSS Paris and Escorial; **אילא**] printed editions and Vatican 115; **אלעז'**] MS Florence.

28 **רבא**] MSS Munich, Paris, Escorial and Vatican 115ב (note that the aleph was added above the line); **רבה**] MS Hamburg and the printed editions.

29 **וקם רבה בשטתיה דר' זירא**] missing in MS Florence; The medieval Talmudist, Rabbi Shmuel b. Meir (RaSHBaM) marks this line for deletion, and it apparently was missing from the Talmudic text before R. Ḥananel b. Ḥushiel.

30 **שמע מינה**] all witnesses other than MS Florence and the Munich binding fragment, which omit.

31 **אוירא דארץ־ישראל**] Almost all witnesses; **אויר/י/א דארעא דישראל**] MSS Munich 95, Florence, and Munich bookbinding.

32 There are textual irregularities with the sentence "Rava adopted the opinion of Rabbi Zeira." For one, the line disrupts the flow of the passage, so that R. Zeira seems to be, rather unusually, commenting on an external report concerning his and Rava's positions. Not incidentally, the line is missing or marked for deletion in some witnesses. Arguably,

each center, as the prominent sage Rava, who lived out the entirety of his years in Babylonia and elsewhere defended Babylonia learning from Palestinian criticism,[33] ends up taking up the Babylonian opinion that had been abandoned by R. Zeira, thereby securing the Babylonian tradition.[34]

In reflecting on his change of opinion,[35] R. Zeira refers to a connection between the "*avira*" of the Land of Israel and the quality of learning undertaken there. Against common readings of "*avira*" as "air,"[36] it is more likely that R. Zeira is contrasting the learning associated with the *space* of Babylonia—an established meaning of the term "*avira*" in Talmudic Aramaic[37]— with the learning that can be found in, and which is intimately connected with, the Land of Israel.

we might reconstruct an earlier version of the passage as follows:
When Rabbi Zeira ascended [to the Land of Israel] he adopted the opinion of Rabbi Il'a. He said: Conclude from this that the airspace of the Land of Israel makes one wise.
Only later in the history of the text was the phrase "Rava adopted the opinion of Rabbi Zeira" added.

33 See b. Ketubot 75a.

34 Yosef Keller, *Perush u-Fisqe Rav Hai Ga'on le-Masekhet Shabat* (Brooklyn, N.Y., 2006), p. 134.

35 In most witnesses, R. Zeira is recorded as saying "*conclude from this*," meaning that it is he who self-reflectively drew the conclusion about why he changed his ruling. Note also that some of the witnesses that omit this phrase record the Aramaic form of the word for "*Land* of Israel," thereby matching the Aramaic-language report of R. Zeira's move to the Land and his legal reversal.

36 One common interpretation was that R. Zeira was extolling the health benefits of Palestinian air. See E. E. Halevi, *Agadot ha-Amora'im* (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1977), p. 122. A related reading can already be found in Yehudah ha-Levi, *The Kuzari: In Defense of the Despised Faith* (trans. N. Daniel Korobkin; Northvale, N.J.: Jason Aronson, 1998), II, §22, p. 78, which adopts a Greek-inflected climatology. See Abraham Melamed, "The Greek Theory of Climate in Medieval Jewish Thought: Absorption, Influence, and Application," *The Routledge Handbook of Identity and the Environment in the Classical and Medieval Worlds*, eds. Rebecca Futo Kennedy and Molly Jones-Lewis (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 128-144. This notion, along with references to R. Zeira's claim, was then taken up in Zionist rhetoric of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, for which see Derek Jonathan Penslar, "What's Love Got to Do With It? The Emotional Language of Early Zionism," *Journal of Israeli History* 38 (2020): 25–52.

37 While *avira* is sometimes translated like its distant English cognate as "air," in this context it would be better rendered as territory, or "airspace." Indeed, the term is occasionally deployed specifically to indicate airspace, such as when the rabbis

Indeed, I believe a similar use of the equivalent Hebrew term for airspace (*avir*) shows up in another Talmudic passage that, it turns out, is a Babylonian reworking of the teaching earlier ascribed to R. Yoḥanan in the Midrash.

b. Sanhedrin 109a

אמר ר׳ יוחנן: מגדל – שליש נבלע ושליש נשרף ושליש קיים.
אמר רב: אויר מגדל משכח תלמוד.[38]
אמר רב יוסף: בבל ובור־סייף סימן רע לתורה.
בבל – ״כי שם בלל יי שפת כל הארץ״[39]
מאי בור־סייף? אמר רב אסי[40]: בור שפת[41].

R. Yoḥanan said: [Regarding] the Tower [of Babel]: a third was swallowed up, a third was burnt, and a third still stands.
Rav said: The airspace (*avir*) of the Tower [of Babel] makes one forget learning (*talmud*).
Rav Yosef said: Babel and Borsippa are a bad sign for Torah [learning].
Babel— "because there the Lord mixed up (*balal*) the languages (*sefat*) of the whole earth" (Genesis 11:9).
What is Borsippa (*Bor-Sif*)? Rav Asi said: A language (*sefat*) pit (*bor*—a homonym of the term for ignoramus).[42]

differentiate between the ritual impurity status of the *space* of the Diaspora as opposed to disconnected clods of earth from there (b. Shabbat 15b).

38 **משכח תלמוד**] MS Herzog; **משכח את התלמוד**] MSS Munich and Karlsruhe (where it is added in the margin; **משכח**] printed eds. and MS Florence; **משכחו**] MS Oxford.

39 **בבל כי שם בלל יי שפת כל הארץ**] MS Munich; see also MSS Karlsruhe: **בבל מאי טעמ' כי שם בלל יי שפת כל הארץ**; and Florence: **בבל מאי? אמ' רב יוסף כי שם בלל**; MS Herzog and printed eds.: (omit).

40 **אמר רב אסי**] MSS Herzog, Munich and printed eds.; **אמ ר׳**] MS Florence; Karlsruhe, Aruch and Yalqut parallel omit.

41 **שפת**] MS Herzog; **שאפי**] ed. Venice; **שפי**] Munich; **שפ((ו))}י{א**] Karlsruhe.

42 According to another reading, referenced in the previous footnote, this can be rendered as "a drained (*shafa*) pit."

The passage begins with R. Yoḥanan describing the tripartite composition of the ruined Tower of Babel.[43] Subsequently, in an apparent echo of R. Zeira's reflection on the airspace (*avira*) of the Land of Israel, a teaching attributed to Rav conceives of the problem of learning in Babylonia spatially. Merely being in the vicinity (*avir*) of the great and infamous symbol of Babylon, the Tower, is enough to make one forget one's learning. The rest of the passage, which records traditions about Babylon and Borsippa being cursed places for Torah learning, suffers from textual problems, yet it is likely an echo of the folk-etymology R. Yoḥanan offered his student in Genesis Rabbah, in which a lack of understanding is attributed to Babel/Borsippa's named legacy as the site of primordial linguistic confusion.[44]

Nevertheless, even if the texts are closely related, there is a subtle but signal difference between the Bavli version and its midrashic precursor: Rather than recording a private, teasing dialogue between a Palestinian sage and his Babylonian student, the Talmudic formulation presents a generalized claim that these charged Babylonian places—arguably representing Babylon more broadly[45]—are themselves scholastically

43 Like his remark about the confusion of his Babylonian student, this statement is perhaps also based on a midrashic reading of terms used to describe the Divine plan to destroy Babylonia: "Let us, then, go down there (שָׁם) and confound (נָבְלָה) their speech (שְׂפָתָם)…" (Genesis 11:7). I suggest that R. Yoḥanan is midrashically reading נָבְלָה as נִבְלַע—"swallowed"; שְׂפָתָם as if it were the Aramaic (weak) verb SPP meaning "to be burned" (see for example the Peshitta to Numbers 11:1: ܘܐܣܬܦܬ ܒܗܘܢ ܢܘܪܐ, "a fire **burned** among them"); and the word "there" (שָׁם) as a reference to the part of the Tower that still stands *there*. Hence, "a third swallowed up (*nivl'a*), a third burnt (*safa*), and a third still stands there (*sham*)."

44 The inclusion of the name "Rav Yosef," and "Rav Asi" in some of the witnesses possibly resulted from confusion with, or perhaps were prompted by, the similarly sounding place name, "Borsif." Additionally, the inclusion of the biblical text's own etymology of Babel in some manuscripts (and its exclusion from others), as well as the difficulties rendering the final word in the passage, may have resulted from other transmission errors of the original midrash, which is better preserved in Genesis Rabbah.

45 Indeed, there is little evidence that these specific locations, Migdal, Borsippa, and the *town* of Babel (in any case, it is difficult to differentiate between the town of Babel and the region. See Oppenheimer, *Babylonia Judaica*, p. 59 ff) were places that rabbinic Jews would potentially settle in, to then to elicit warnings from the sages. It seems, instead, that these toponyms are invoked for their broader symbolic

cursed. Thus, unlike Palestinian texts which mainly criticize the learning of specific Babylonian rabbis[46] alongside sages from other locales, we find the Bavli presenting rabbinic learning in Babylonia as broadly, and spatially, distinct from Palestinian learning.[47]

Self-Criticism and Counter-Criticism in the Babylonian Talmud

We have observed how virtually all statements uttered against Babylonian learning are attributed to rabbis in Palestine. Still, they show up specifically in the Bavli. It has become a working assumption in the field that traditions appearing only, or primarily, in the Bavli while being largely or entirely absent from Palestinian rabbinic texts, mainly reflect rabbinic Babylonia.[48]

With that in mind, let us consider a sequence of anti-Diasporic traditions, partially adduced above, preserved in the Bavli yet with no extensive parallel in Palestinian rabbinic literature:

value for Babylonia more generally, which, I have suggested, is rooted in midrashic readings of Genesis.

46 In fact, one of the only passages preserved in a Palestinian rabbinic work that refers to learning in Babylonia at all is positive and does not seem to conceive of it as a collective scholastic project. I am referring to a tradition about the planting of date-palms in Babylonia prior to the arrival of the Judean exiles, "so that they crave sweetness, which accustoms the tongue to Torah" (*y. Tan* 4:7; 69b // Pesiqta de-Rav Kahana, Divrei Yirmiyahu 10, ed. Mandelbaum p. 233).

47 Having highlighted a connection between Babylonian learning and Babylonian space that is manifest specifically in the Bavli, it is important to acknowledge a seemingly geographic component of how Palestinian rabbinic learning is conceived of in Palestinian rabbinic texts. For example, there is a tannaitic panegyric to the Land of Israel which asserts that "the Torah is [to be found] in the Land of Israel" (Sifre Deuteronomy 'Eqev, *pisqa* 39; ed. Finkelstein pp. 70-71). Similarly, Genesis Rabbah 16:4 links various rabbinic corpora and rabbinic disciplines with the Land of Israel. However, on closer inspection, in these sources the spatiality of the "Torah of the Land of Israel" is not articulated against Torah learning associated with another place, such as Babylonia. Instead, its function is to exclude the "Torah of the *gentiles*" rather than Jewish learning in other locales.

48 For a good statement of the principle, see Shamma Yehuda Friedman, "'Wonder Not at a Gloss in Which the Name of an Amora is Mentioned': The Amoraic Statements and the Anonymous Material in the Sugyot of the Bavli Revisited," in *Melekhet Mahshevet*, eds. Aaron Amit and Aharon Shemesh (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 2011), pp. 101–44 (Hebrew).

b. Sanhedrin 24a

אמר ר' הושעיה: מאי דכתיב "ואקח לי שני מקלות לאחד קראתי נעם ולאחד קראתי חבלים"?
"נעם" – אלו תלמידי חכמים שבארץ־ישראל שמנעימין זה לזה בהלכה.
"חבלים" – אלו תלמידי חכמים שבבבל שמחבלין זה את זה בהלכה.
"ויאמר אלה שני בני היצהר העומדים על אדון כל הארץ"
"יצהר" – אמר ר' יצחק: אלו תלמידי חכמים שבארץ־ישראל שנוחין[49] זה לזה בהלכה כשמן.
"ושנים זתים עליה" – אלו תלמידי חכמים שבבבל שממרין[50] זה לזה בהלכה כזתים.
בבל – אמר ר' יוחנן:[51] בלולה במקרא, בלולה במשנה, בלולה בתלמוד.
"במחשכים הושיבני כמתי עולם" – אמר ר' ירמיה[52] זה תלמודה של בבל.

R. Hosha'ya said: What is it that is written: "And I took for myself two staves; one of which I name No'am and the other I called Ḥoblim" (Zecharia 11:7)?
"No'am"—these are the sages of the Land of Israel, who treat each other graciously (*mann<u>a</u>'im*) in [the study of] *halakha*.
"Ḥoblim"—these are the sages of Babylonia, who injure each other (*me<u>ḥ</u>abl<u>i</u>m*) in [the study of] *halakhah.*
"Then he explained, 'They are the two Sons of Yitzhar who attend the Lord of all the earth" (Zecharia 4:14).
"Yitzhar"—R. Yitzḥaq said: these are the sages of the Land of Israel, who treat each other graciously in [the study of] *halakhah* like oil (*"yitzhar*").
"and by it are two olive trees" (Zecharia 4:3)—these are the sages of Babylonia, who treat each other bitterly in [the study of] *halakhah*, like olives.
"Babel"—Said R. Yoḥanan: Mixed (*belulah*) with Scripture, mixed with Mishnah, and mixed with learning (*talmud*).

49 **שנוחין**] Many witnesses; **שמשנין**] MSS Karlsruhe, Florence, and Munich.
50 **שממרין**] Most Manuscripts; **שמחדדין**] MS Herzog.
51 **בבל אמר ר' יוחנן**] MSS Herzog and Florence; **א"ר יוחנן בבל**] MSS Munich and Karlsruhe (prior to marginal addition); **מאי בבל א"ר יוחנן**] printed editions and marginal addition to Karlsruhe (with typical variation).
52 **ירמיה**] Almost all MSS; **יוחנ'**] MS Florence.

> "He made me dwell in darkness like those long dead" (Lamentations 3:6)—Said R. Yirmiyah: This is the learning (*talmud*) of Babylonia.

Scholars have struggled to explain the odd preponderance of anti-Babylonian barbs in the Babylonian Talmud such as we find in this passage. Of course, self-criticism has been recognized as a key feature of rabbinic storytelling,[53] especially in the Babylonian Talmud,[54] but what are to make of its appearance in this context? Some have suggested that Babylonian rabbis use homilies and stories critical of Babylonian rabbinic society didactically, to encourage among their peers better ethical behavior, such as was presumed to be found among Palestinian sages.[55] Still, a purely didactic reading of this material, given its extent and complexity, strikes me as inadequate.

When we look closer at the sources, we find that alongside the Bavli's record of Palestinian critiques of Babylonian sages and learning, there is not infrequently a response, sometimes explicit and sometimes between the lines, to these barbs. Thus, in reference to R. Yirmiyah's recurring

53 This is one of the significant findings of the founder of modern literary studies of rabbinic literature, Yonah Fraenkel. See especially Yonah Fraenkel, *Darkhei Ha-aggadah Ve-hamidrash* (Givatayim: Yad Latalmud, 1991).

54 See for example Christine Elizabeth Hayes, "Displaced Self-Perceptions: The Deployment of 'Mînîm' and Romans in b. Sanhedrin 90b-91a," in *Religious and Ethnic Communities in Later Roman Palestine*, ed. Hayim Lapin (Bethesda, Md.: University of Maryland Press, 1998), pp. 249–89; and James Adam Redfield, "Redacting Culture: Ethnographic Authority in the Talmudic Arrival Scene," *Jewish Social Studies* 22 (2016): 29-80. Daniel Boyarin, *Socrates and the Fat Rabbis* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), argues that such a counter voice is an important quality of the Bavli's redaction. On the other hand, Fraenkel did not see reflexivity as a distinct feature of the Bavli. See Hillel I. Newman, "Closing the Circle: Yonah Fraenkel, the Talmudic Story, and Rabbinic History," in *How Should Rabbinic Literature Be Read in the Modern World?*, ed. Matthew Kraus (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2006), pp. 105–35, especially pp. 112-116. On this point see also Dina Stein, *Textual Mirrors: Reflexivity, Midrash, and the Rabbinic Self* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), pp. 6-8.

55 Baruch Kehat, "The Talmud Against Itself: An Examination of the Aggadah at b. Sanhedrin 24", *Asufot* 5 (2007): 187-194 (Hebrew).

insult of Babylonian sages, one passage presents Rava issuing the following biting retort:

b. Ketubot 75a

אמר רבא: וחד מינן כי סליק להתם עדיף כתרי מנייהו. דהא ר' ירמיה כי הוה הכא לא הוה ידע מאי קאמרי רבנן וכי סליק להתם קארי לן בבלאי טפשאי.

Rava said: And one of us, upon ascending there [to the Land of Israel], is as if he is worth two of them. For R. Yirmiyah, when he was here [in Babylonia], he could not understand what the rabbis were saying. Yet ever since he went up there, he calls us "stupid Babylonians"!

A more subtle response is recorded in a source mentioned earlier, namely, R. Zeira's fasting undertaken to forget the "*talmud*" of Babylonia:

b. Bava Metzia 85a

רבי זורא יתי ארבעין תעניאתא דנישתכח תלמודא דבבל מיניה.
יתי ארבעין[56] אחרניאתא דלא נישכוב ר' אלעא[57] בחייה[58] דלא ניפול עליה מילי דציבורא.[59]
יתי ארבעין[60] אחרניאתא דלא תשלוט ביה נורא דגהנם.[61]
כל תלתין יומי הוה בדיק נפשיה ושגר תנורא וסליק יתיב ביה.[62]
יומא חד יהבו ביה רבנן עינא. איחרוך שקיה. קרו ליה חרוכא קטין שאקי.

R. Zeira fasted forty fasts so that the learning of Babylonia should be forgotten by him. He fasted another forty so that R. Il'a would not pass away during his lifetime, so that communal affairs not

56 **ארבעין**] MSS Oxford, Florence and Escorial; all others: **מאה**

57 **אלעא**] MS Oxford; **אלעאי**] MS Hamburg and the Cremona binding fragment; **אלעזר**] printed editions (**אלע'**), MS Munich (**אלעז'**) and MS Vatican (**אלע'**); **אילעא**] MS Florence and Sefer ha-Mafteah of R. Nissim on Berakhot.

58 **בחייה**] MSS Oxford and Florence; all others: **בני{ה}**

59 **דלא ניפול עליה מילי דציבורא**] Added secondarily in MSS MS Oxford Heb c. 17/69-78 (with an extra "**יתיב ארבעין**") and Florence. All others have this within the text.

60 **ארבעין**] MSS Oxford, Florence and Escorial; all others: **מאה**

61 MSS Escorial and Hamburg add: **ואפילו הכי**.

62 MSS Hamburg, Munich, Escorial, Vatican 115, British Library and printed editions add **לא {הוה} שלטא ביה נורא**.

> fall upon him (that is, R. Zeira). He fasted another forty so that the fire of Gehenna would not have dominion over him. Every thirty days he would check himself, firing up the oven and going to sit in it. One day the rabbis gave him the Eye. His legs were singed. They called him "singed one of thin legs!"

At first blush, R. Zeira is presented here as a pious sage undertaking an arduous number of fasts for apparently worthy causes. And the fasts recall other passages where R. Zeira's move to the Land of Israel is connected to piety and repentance.[63] Yet upon closer view, in this text there is a different implication regarding his abstention from eating.

Scholars have offered various explanations for R. Zeira's first set of fasts to forget the learning of Babylonia. Yaakov Sussman ventures that R. Zeira was concerned with the confusion that may result in flitting back and forth between Babylonian and Palestinian learning. As a result, he wanted to erase the Babylonian learning from his memory so he could focus his intellect entirely on the *talmud* of the Land of Israel.[64] In an ingenious study,

63 See the following statement recorded at b. Berakhot 57a:

הרואה שעורה בחלום סרו עונותיו. שנאמר "וסר עוניך וחטאתך תכופר".
אמר ר' זירא: אי לא דחזאי שעורה לא סליקי מבבל לארץ־ישראל.

One who sees barley in a dream [can be assured that] his sins have been removed. As it says: "Your guilt shall depart; And your sin be purged away" (Isaiah 6:7). R. Zeira said: Had I not seen barley [in my dreams] I would not have ascended from Babylonia to the Land of Israel.

64 Yaakov Sussman, "Oral Torah in Its Literal Sense," in *Mehqerei Talmud III: Talmudic Studies Dedicated to the Memory of Professor Ephraim E. Urbach* (Hebrew; Jerusalem: Magnes, 2005), pp. 209–384 (251). Earlier, and along somewhat similar lines, Heinrich Graetz explained that R. Zeira disliked the dialectics associated with Babylonian learning and prayed that he would forget them so that he might learn in the more straightforward manner associated with the Land of Israel. See Heinrich Graetz, *History of the Jews* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1956), vol. 2, pp. 557-558. On the preference of the Maskilim for the Yerushalmi, which is in part connected to the R. Zeira traditions, see Isaiah Gafni, "Between Babylonia and the Land of Israel: Ancient History and the Clash of Ideologies in Modern Jewish Historiography," *Ẓion* 62 (1997): 213–42 (Hebrew). Indeed, the negative depiction of R. Yirmiyah and his troubled relationship with Babylonian rabbinic scholasticism was a favorite theme of the Maskilim, who saw in it everything that was wrong with the learning of the Babylonian Talmud and Orthodox Judaism. See Hannan Gafni, "The Image of R. Jeremiah in the Nineteenth

Avraham Goldberg argued that despite a professed love of the Torah of the Land of Israel over that of Babylonia, R. Zeira was actually smuggling in Babylonian teachings which he thought, or wanted to think, were Palestinian. His fasts were undertaken to "forget" this inconvenient truth.[65]

One problem with these explanations is that they do not contextualize R. Zeira's fasting in light of late antique practices of fasting for success in learning, even as referenced in the same Talmudic passage. In the anecdote recorded prior to the report of R. Zeira's fasting, we read of Rav Yosef undertaking his own three sets of fasts in order to secure Torah learning for himself, his children, and his grandchildren. Although there is some variety in the manuscripts regarding the number of fasts in each set, almost all of our witnesses record "forty" for the first number of fasts intended to secure Rav Yosef's own learning.[66] This corresponds to ritual practices recorded in Heikhalot's "Sar Torah" corpus, where it is recommended to pietists to fast forty days—the number of days Moses spent receiving the Torah on Mount Sinai (Exodus 24:18)—in order to successfully *retain* Torah learning.[67] In this light, R. Zeira's fasting is shown to be most unusual, one might even say perverse: Some fast to remember; R. Zeira fasts to forget.

Similarly, a closer reading of R. Zeira's subsequent, supposedly righteous fasts, also reveals them to be less praiseworthy than they originally appear. The second set is ostensibly undertaken in order to

Century Haskalah Literature," in eds. Geoffry Herman, Meir Ben Shahar and Ahron Oppenheimer, *Between Babylonia and the Land of Israel: Studies in Honor of Isaiah M. Gafni* (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Press, 2017), pp. 419-36 (Hebrew).

65 Goldberg, "Rabbi Ze'ira and Babylonian Custom in Palestine."

66 The only exception in the surviving manuscripts is Vatican 115a, which records "one hundred twenty." See further Shamma Yehuda Friedman, "On the Historical Aggadah of the Babylonian Talmud," in *Saul Lieberman Memorial Volume*, ed. Shamma Yehuda Friedman (Jerusalem: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1993), 119–64, especially p. 136 n. 76 (Hebrew).

67 See Michael D. Swartz, *Scholastic Magic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), p. 160. It should be noted that various practices of Christian fasting, following Matthew 4:2, are also for forty days, though this is normally not linked to success in learning.

pressure Heaven to grant a certain Rabbi Il'a longevity.[68] However, R. Zeira does not mortify his flesh for the sake of this rabbinic colleague, rather, for the selfish reason that were R. Il'a to die, R. Zeira would be forced to take up the communal responsibilities that the former had shouldered, and would thus be prevented from spending his time as he pleased.[69] Finally, the purpose of R. Zeira's last plurality of fasts is to fortify himself against the flames of hell—again, seemingly a laudable, if extreme, expression of asceticism. Yet, the Talmud goes on to report how R. Zeira would regularly, and inappropriately, test the effects of his fasting by sitting inside a burning oven. His rabbinic colleagues were not pleased with such behavior and when they gave him the Evil Eye, his legs were singed and a new, insulting, nickname was born.[70] Instead of extolling a

68 It may be recalled that this is the rabbi whose opinion R. Zeira is said to have accepted when he immigrated to the territory of the Land of Israel (b. Bava Batra 158b). R. Zeira's relationship with R 'Ila is also evinced in the Yerushalmi: "R. Ze'orah praised him and called him a builder of the Torah (בנייה דאוריתא)" (y. Yoma 3:4; 40c // y. Gittin 7:3, 48d).

69 While the traditional reading of the passage is that R. Zeira would have spent his time learning, this is not made explicit. Perhaps also relevant is a tradition at b. Ketubot 112a (attributed in most witnesses to R. Zeira though see the printed editions, and an addition to one manuscript version, which records "R. Elazer"), where R. Zeira refers to "escaping" (פלטי לי) divine disapproval while marking various achievements beginning with his immigration to the Land of Israel. Although that passage is not about R. Zeira's shirking of responsibility, the tradition may be a distant echo of our passage.

70 The rabbis' criticism of R. Zeira corresponds to a wider, anti-pietistic strain that is pronounced in Babylonian rabbinic culture. For a classic study, see Eliezer Diamond, *Holy Men and Hunger Artists: Fasting and Asceticism in Rabbinic Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 121-132. See also Holger M. Zellentin, *Rabbinic Parodies of Jewish and Christian Literature*, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), pp. 167-212. More specifically, R. Zeira's self-testing of his piety by sitting in an oven recalls the critical talmudic tale about Rabbi Ḥiyya bar Ashi, who "was accustomed to say, whenever he would fall on his face in prayer: May the Merciful One save us from the evil inclination." As the story unfolds, R. Zeira's wife disguises herself as a prostitute and seduces R. Ḥiyya, who then, mortified, walks into the oven that his wife has lit. For a recent treatment of the story along with references to prior scholarship, see Michal Bar-Asher Siegal, "Syriac Monastic Motifs in the Babylonian Talmud: The Ḥeruta Story Reconsidered (b. Qiddushin 81b)," in *Jews and Syriac Christians: Intersections across the First Millennium*, ed. Aaron Butts and Simcha Gross (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020), pp. 27–46.

sage who conducted himself piously in his adoration of the Holy Land and its learning, these Babylonian traditions portray a ludicrous "pious fool," whose disdain for the learning of Babylonia merits its own sharp and satirical critique.[71] In this way, a Talmudic source that records the disparagement of the learning of Babylonia by a rabbi fasting to forget it, gets its revenge, so to speak, by lampooning him.

Returning to b. Sanhedrin 24a, with its criticisms of the Diaspora and its sages, upon closer view, even that passage evinces small attempts to mitigate the anti-Babylonian blows. For example, in R. Yoḥanan's interpretation of Canticles 8:8 about Elam, "whose inhabitants merited to learn but did not merit to teach," other sources suggest that in referring to Elam, R. Yoḥanan actually means to criticize all the Jews of Greater Iran, including Babylonians.[72] Apparently, the rabbis who gave us the passage at b. Sanhedrin 24a tinkered with this originally, more broadly anti-diasporic teaching in order to distinguish between Babylonia and Elam, and thus inure Babylonian rabbis from greater insult.[73] Thus, when trying to account for why Palestinian barbs against Babylonian learning are preserved in the Babylonian Talmud, we must admit that the negativity often comes within a larger textual package containing reworkings, retort, satire, and even prickly pride.

Notwithstanding the mitigation, the question remains as to why the Bavli includes the negative sources to begin with. In a classic study, Jeffrey Rubenstein demonstrated how the Bavli similarly preserves and subverts classic sources that prefer the Land of Israel and the rabbinic center there,

71 It might be noted that, unconnected to his attitude towards Babylonian learning, R. Zeira is more generally portrayed in Palestinian literature as something of a pious fool. See Duvdevani, "Literary Aspects of Rabbinic Attributions in the Babylonian Talmud."; and Kiperwasser, "Narrating the Self: Tales of Rabbi Zeira's Arrival to the Land of Israel."

72 See b. Pesaḥim 87a.

73 Additionally, a variant preserved in the Yemenite manuscript of b. Sanhedrin 24a refers to Babylonian sages "sharpening one another" as opposed to the other version "embittering one another," thereby recalling laudatory passages like b. Shabbat 63a: "Two Torah scholars who *sharpen one another* in halakha, the Holy One, Blessed be He, ensures their success."

over the Babylonian Diaspora and its rabbinic community.[74] As Rubenstein's analysis shows, both textually and culturally, this was a tortured process which required a complex choreography that jumped back and forth between rabbinic Babylonia and Roman Palestine, the latter of which exerted a strong pull due to its status as the Promised Land, and it being the historic home of the rabbinic movement and the foundational Mishnah. As in the present study, that *sugyah* is animated by the question of how Babylonian Jews saw themselves and how they thought Palestinian rabbis saw them—which ended up being quite different from how Palestinians may *actually* have perceived things.

Judging from the absence of a coherent and distinct notion of Babylonian learning in classic Palestinian compilations, it appears that Palestinian rabbis did not make too much of Babylonian learning as a special collective endeavor. Even if Babylonia constituted, at least terminologically-speaking, a special kind of "there,"[75] Babylonian rabbis and their learning were ultimately but one important cluster in a constellation of communities that existed outside the Galilean center. This was decidedly not the case from the Babylonian perspective, as Babylonian rabbis compared themselves to the central "sages of the Land of Israel," who, in their view at least, enjoyed special status for both historical and theological reasons. Like someone playing out a popularity contest within the borders of their mind, Babylonian sages recalled snippets of Palestinian statements about them, and enlarged the conversation into a robust, internal conversation that worked through the relationship between the various players, which in this case meant the rabbinic centers, their scholastic activities, and the evolving scholastic endeavors that would ultimately constitute the Babylonian and Palestinian Talmuds.

74 In this way Babylonian authorities counter assumptions about the supremacy of the Land of Israel made by Jews living in Palestine. See Jeffrey L. Rubenstein, "Coping with the Virtues of the Land of Israel: An Analysis of Bavli Ketubot 110b-112a," in *Israel-Diaspora Relations in the Second Temple and Talmudic Periods*, Isaiah Gafni ed. (Hebrew; Jerusalem: Shazar, 2004), pp. 159-88 (Hebrew).

75 For example, through the use of the preposition *taman* ("there") to refer specifically to Babylonia.

"Mixed with Scripture, Mishnah, and *talmud*": The Composition of Babylonian Rabbinic Learning

Given the negative depictions of Babylonian learning preserved in the Bavli, one wonders whether beyond the invective, our sources note any tangible, qualitative difference between Babylonian and Palestinian *learning*. Of course, medieval writers since Pirqo ben Bavoi have contrasted the qualities of Babylonian and Palestinian rabbinic discourse, and modern studies have devoted significant energies to the matter.[76] But what about rabbinic sources themselves?[77]

R. Yirmiyah's concluding statement at b. Sanhedrin 24a leaves us in the dark about how and whether Babylonian learning was thought to differ substantively from Palestinian learning. However, it is preceded by a teaching attributed to R. Yoḥanan that does seem to say something qualitative about Babylonian scholarship:

> בבל—אמר ר' יוחנן: בלולה במקרא, בלולה במשנה, בלולה בתלמוד.
> "במחשכים הושיבני כמתי עולם" – אמר ר' ירמיה זה תלמודה של בבל.

> "Babel"—Said R. Yoḥanan: Mixed (*belulah*) with Scripture, mixed with Mishnah, and mixed with learning (*talmud*).
> "He made me dwell in darkness like those long dead" (Lamentations 3:6)—Said R. Yirmiyah: This is the learning (*talmud*) of Babylonia.

At first glance, R. Yoḥanan's statement looks like a typical midrashic folk-etymology of a biblical toponym.[78] On closer view, the text constitutes

76 See for example Leib Moscovitz, *Talmudic Reasoning: From Casuistics to Conceptualization* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002); and Jacob Samuel Zuri, *Toldot Darkhe ha-Limud ba-Yeshivot Darom, Galil, Sura, u-Neharde'a* (Jerusalem: Aḥdut, 1914).

77 Apart from the text that I am about to discuss, the only substantive description of Babylonian rabbinic learning I am aware of is the following retort: "Perhaps you are from Pumbedita, where they pass an elephant through the eye of a needle?!" (b. Bava Metzia 38b). This line, however, comes up in a localized discussion concerning Nehardea and would seem to have little bearing on how Babylonian rabbinic learning as a whole was conceived.

78 Note especially those versions cited in n. 51 that articulate the question as "what is 'Babel'," which is common in this kind of midrashic paronomasia.

another iteration of the tradition first recorded in the Genesis Rabbah passage where R. Yoḥanan explained a student's difficulty in Torah learning by way of the Tower of Babel myth[79]—but now with a twist. And even more than the parallel at b. Sanhedrin 109a, the present text transforms the tradition from accounting for the disability of an individual Babylonian student into a broad statement about Babylonian learning. R. Yoḥanan is not claiming that Babylonia is a pedagogic curse on people who originated in, or who now wish to learn, there. Rather, it is apparently the composition of Babylonian rabbinic discourse *itself* that is deemed a mixture of learning, just like the babble of the builders of the Tower of Babylon.

Among other things, the equivalency drawn in this statement between what is apparently the learned tradition of Babylonia and the toponym, "Babylonia," is a striking realization of the Talmudic association between Babylonian space and Babylonian learning highlighted above. Still, what exactly is being described of Babylonian learning?

Let me first clarify that R. Yoḥanan is almost certainly *not* saying that Babylonians are mixed-up in their understanding *of* Scripture, Mishnah, and *talmud*. To begin with, the root BLL in the sense of having a confused understanding of some matter, is to my knowledge unattested in rabbinic Hebrew.[80] Moreover, if R. Yoḥanan was simply trying to say that Babylon/Babylonians are "mixed-up" in their learning, why divide "Babylon" into three parts and say that they are mixed up in *each of* these primary subjects. As such, the likely reading of the teaching is that the mixture to which R. Yoḥanan refers is the mixture of the three components into a single entity known as "Babylon."

But this only raises further questions. After all, the three elements with which Babylonian learning is said to be mixed are the three pillars that comprise the canon to which the rabbis, be they Palestinian or Babylonian, devote themselves; namely, the Hebrew Bible, the Mishnah, and the more advanced discourse that emerged subsequent to Mishnah study, often

79 Apart from the shared content, both b. Sanhedrin 109a and our passage at b. Sanhedrin 24a break down the architecture of [the Tower of] Babel into thirds, the former structurally (earlier, in n. 43, I suggested that this structure was based on a midrashic reading of three adjacent terms in Genesis 11:7) and the latter textually.

80 The *piel* participle, מבולבל, which is now used in this sense in Modern Hebrew, appears in the record only later.

known as "*talmud*."[81] Indeed, R. Yoḥanan's description of Babylonian rabbinic learning appears to recall other, largely positive, formulations that perceive of rabbinic learning, including that which is named "*talmud*," as sizable and inclusive.[82] Here, for example, is a midrashic meditation comparing rabbinic discourse ("*talmud*") to the Great Sea:

> Canticles Rabbah 5 pisqa 3
>
> "ממולאים בתרשיש" – זה התלמוד שהוא כים גדול. הדא מה דאת אמר "תרשישה", והדא מה דאת אמר "כל הנחלים הולכים אל הים".
>
> "With beryl (*tarshish*) inlaid (*memulaim*)" (Canticles 5:14)—this is the *talmud* which is like a Great Sea. This is as it says "to Tarshish" (Jonah 1:3); and this is like it says: "All the streams run into the sea (Ecclesiastes 1:7).

This line appears in an interpretation of Canticles' bejeweled portrayal of the Song's male lover, in which references to precious stones are taken to signify aspects of religious learning. The midrashic text deploys a metaphor of its own; a maritime scheme[83] that highlights certain qualities

81 See Yisrael Hazani, "ותלמוד תורה כנגד כולם: An Anthology," *Mishlav* 30 (1997): 51–87, esp. pp. 55-60. Among other sources that valorize these three main elements of rabbinic engagement, see m. Qiddushin 1:10 (//t. Qiddushin 1:17). Note that the term *derekh ha-eretz* used there sometimes parallels other terms, especially "*talmud*," which, again, seem to refer to an actualization of rabbinic learning beyond Mishnah study.

82 See for example Ecclesiastes Rabbah 2:8, *pisqa* 1, which links rabbinic discourses to another semantic field, agricultural installations, relating the gardens and orchards of Ecclesiastes 2:8 to "the great recited traditions," of R. Ḥiyya the great, R. Hosha'aya the great, and the teaching (*mishnah*) of Bar Qapara. See also b. Eruvin 21b, where Ecclesiastes 12:12 ("The making of many books is without limit; And much study is a wearying of the flesh") is used to explain why the Oral Law is not written. Similar ideas are adduced in the locus classicus on Oral Law at b. Gittin 60b, and its parallels.

83 The exegetical basis is the association of the biblical Mediterranean port city, "Tarshish," with the "sea-colored" stone Tarshishah (Exodus 28:20), which is rendered in the Aramaic translations of Onkelos, Pseudo-Jonathan, and Neofiti as beryl (*chrome*) of the [Great (in Pseudo-Jonathan and Neofiti)] sea. See also Pseudo-Jonathan's rendition of the word "*tarshishah*" (to Tarshish) at Jonah 1:3 "And Jonah got up to flee *to the sea*" (*yama*).

of rabbinic discourse.[84] Notably, the sea metaphor does not only signify great size, but also the inclusive nature of "the *talmud*." Thus, after connecting the Hebrew word, "Tarshish" to "sea," the Midrash renders the biblical verb, "*memulaim*" as "filled," referencing a verse from Ecclesiastes that meditates on streams flowing into the sea. Together, the two aspects of the maritime metaphor conceive of "the *talmud*" as a gigantic body of learning that holds within its depths numerous "streams."[85]

Similarities aside, there are of course features that distinguish R. Yoḥanan's description of Babylonian learning in b. Sanhedrin 24a from assessments of rabbinic learning like we find in the Canticles Rabbah text.

84 As it turns out, the well-known metaphor of the Talmud as a large and encompassing sea finds its earliest expression in this Midrash. Cf. Fred Skolnik and Michael Berenbaum, *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd ed. (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA in association with the Keter PubHouse, 2007), vol. 18, p. 228, s.v. "Sea of the Talmud."

85 A similar motif is found in the late Midrash on Proverbs (10, ed. Visotsky, p. 84) where someone whom while alive studied only lore (*hagadah*) and no *talmud*, is interrogated by God for not having occupied himself with *talmud*: "My son, why have you not recited the *talmud*?! For the verse 'All streams run into the sea, yet the sea is never full' refers to the *talmud*!" A different passage from Canticles Rabbah (8:2) uses another metaphor, that of a perfume, to apparently speak in similar terms of *talmud* and Mishnah blended together:

"אשקך מיין הרקח" – זה התלמוד שמפוטם במשניות כרקח.

"I would give you spiced wine to drink"—this is *talmud*, which is spiced with *mishnayot* like a fragrant blend (*roqaḥ*).

However, given the description of "*talmud*" being spiced specifically with Mishnah, it likely refers to midrash, and specifically to Halakhic Midrash, whose redaction came to include references to relevant *mishnayot*. On the other hand, based on context, the reference to "the *talmud*" at Canticles Rabbah 5 *pisqa* 3 appears to more generally signify "rabbinic learning," and in this way parallels R. Yoḥanan's statement about the learning of Babylonia.

It may also be worth mentioning another source, which, given its perplexing reference to "Rabbi submerging most of his *mishnayot* into *talmud* (*y.* Shabbat 16:1; 15c), has greatly exercised scholars. Fortunately, the reading and meaning of this text has now been satisfactorily established and it is no longer relevant to our discussion. See Moshe Asis, *Concordance of Amoraic Terms Expressions and Phrases in the Yerushalmi* (Hebrew; Jerusalem: Jewish Theological Seminary, 2010), p. 1094 n. 1742; and Shlomo Naeh, "Three Comments on the Text of the Yerushalmi," *Lěšonénu* 74 (2012): 195-215 (203-212) (Hebrew).

First, R. Yoḥanan specifies the composition of the streams of tradition comprising Babylonian learning, namely, as Scripture, Mishnah, and "*talmud*." Second, R. Yoḥanan is not interested in a geographically unmarked "*talmud*," but specifically in *Babylonian* rabbinic discourse.[86] Third, unlike the other traditions which register wonderment at the growing size and inclusiveness of rabbinic tradition, R. Yoḥanan seems to be critical of the way in which Babylonian rabbinic discourse mixes its material.

In trying to explain the nature of R. Yoḥanan's criticism in the Bavli, it is helpful to compare it with other critiques of mixed learning. Thus, two passages attributed to Palestinian sages confirm that at least for some rabbis there was a preference to separate religious learning, specifically the three separate curricular sections, Scripture, Mishnah, and *talmud*, rather than mixing it together.

86 Aside from R. Yoḥanan's statement, a few other passages refer to the size of Babylonian learning, even deploying a maritime metaphor. However, those texts list Babylonian discourses alongside others, and say nothing of the composition of the Babylonian material, beyond its size. At most, they may be read as attesting to the Babylonian geographic designation of *some* large collections of rabbinic learning. Thus:

Midrash Psalms 104:22

"זה הים גדול ורחב ידים" – זו תורה, דכתיב "ארוכה מארץ מדה ורחבה מני ים". "רמש אין מספר" – אלו המסכתות. ויש אומרין אלו המשניות דבר קפרא ור' חייא ורב ודרבנן בבלאי.

"This sea great and wide (Psalms 104:25)"—this is Torah (perhaps a reference to all religious learning), as it is written "Longer than earth is its measure, and wider than the sea" (Job 11:9); "creatures beyond number stir" (Psalms 104:25)—these are the tractates. And there are those who say: These are the repeated traditions (*mishnayot*) of Bar Qapara, R. Ḥiyya, Rav, and *that of the Babylonian rabbis*. (emphasis mine)

Another reference to the "repeated traditions of the Babylonians" appears at Genesis Rabbah 33:3 (p. 306), in an anecdote about how R. Ḥiyya who, sequestered after a mishap with Rabbi Yehuda the patriarch, spent his days teaching his nephew, Rav, the "principles of the Torah" – which the Midrash glosses as "the laws (collections) of the Babylonians" (*hilkheta de-bavlai*). Isaiah Gafni has noted that the Yerushalmi parallel to this story (p. Ketubot 12:3; 35a) omits references to Babylonia. See Isaiah Gafni, *Jews of Babylonia in the Talmudic era* (Hebrew; Jerusalem: Shazar, 1990), p. 90, n. 173. This suggests that this narrative was not always told as a story about the supposed Babylonian origins of Rav's education.

b. Qiddushin 30a

אמר רב ספרא משום ר' יהושע בן חנניה[87]: מאי דכתיב "ושננתם לבניך"? אל תיקרי "ושננתם" אלא "ושלשתם".
לעולם ישלש אדם שנותיו, שליש במקרא, שליש במשנה, שליש בתלמוד.
– ומי ידע כמה חיי?! אלא ליומי.[88]

Rav Safra says in the name of R. Yehoshua b. Ḥananyah: What is the meaning of that which is written: "And you shall teach them [the words of Torah] diligently (*veshinantam*) to your sons" (Deuteronomy 6:7)? Do not read "*ve-shinantam*" (related to the word for "twice"), rather, *ve-shilashtam* (related to the word for "thrice"). A person should always divide "his learning" (*shenotav*) into threes: A third for Scripture, a third for Mishnah, and a third for *talmud*.
– But can someone know how long he will live?!
Rather, it means for his day.

A close parallel to this teaching likewise emphasizes the need to separate the "streams" (*palge*) of tradition into separate "divisions" (*pelagin*):

b. Avodah Zarah 19b (MS Paris 1337)

"על פלגי מים"– אמר ר' תנחום בר חנילאי: לעולם ישלש אדם שנותיו שליש במקרא ושליש במשנה ושליש בתלמוד.
ומי ידע כמה חיי?! כי קאמרינן ביומי.

"Beside the streams of water" (*'al palge mayim*; Psalms 1:3)—Said R. Tanḥum b. Ḥanilai: A person should always *divide* his learning into threes: A third for Scripture, a third for Mishnah, and a third for *talmud*.
– But can someone know how long he will live?!
When we said it, [we meant] for his day.

87 **חנניה**] Most witnesses (with expected variant of **חנינא**), apart from MS Oxford 367, which has: **קרחא**; and the old aggadic collection, Hagadot Ḥazal, which records **לוי**, as does R. Asher b. Yehiel.

88 **ליומי**] All MSS, except MS Oxford which records **ליומיה**.

To focus on the passage recorded in b. Qiddushin, Rav Safra quotes a Palestinian teaching advising a division of one's learning—apparently first understood as "his years" (*shennotav*)—into three equal parts.[89] The tradition is ultimately read to encourage maintaining a *daily* agenda where one-third of one's time is devoted to each of the three pillars of the curriculum, respectively. Perhaps this teaching echoes R. Yoḥanan's concern with learning that mixes everything into one big concoction, where learners constantly bounce between the components of the curriculum without cleanly dividing their learning into different segments.[90]

To sum up: In what appears to be the only Talmudic passage in which Babylonian learning is qualitatively described, a teaching attributed to R. Yoḥanan criticizes it for constituting a muddle of the main components of

89 Cf. *m. Avot* 5:21, which counsels dividing childhood education chronologically in intervals of five years:
…five years old for Scripture, ten-years-old for Mishnah…and fifteen-years-old for *talmud*.

90 Another teaching, this one attributed to R. Yoḥanan, might be read in a similar vein: b. Hagigah 10a (MS Munich 6)
"ויליוצא ולבא אין שלום מן הצר"
אמר רב: כיון שיצא אדם מדבר הלכה שוב אין לו שלום.
ושמואל אמר: זה הפורש מתלמוד למשנה.
ור' יוחנן אמר: זה הפורש מתלמוד לתלמוד.
"Neither was there any peace to him that went out or came in due to the adversary" (Zechariah 8:10).
Rav says: When someone leaves a matter of *halakha* he no longer has any peace.
Shmuel says: This refers to one who abandons *talmud* for Mishnah.
R. Yoḥanan says: This refers to someone who abandons one discourse (*talmud*) for [another] discourse (*talmud*).
Here a pair of first-generation amoraim stress the importance of retaining focus on specific forms of learning: Rav cautions against abandoning the study of Jewish law, while Shmuel warns against moving away from "*talmud*"— in this context apparently referring to more advanced rabbinic discourses—in favor of the bare Mishnaic text. The meaning of R. Yoḥanan's statement in the passage is less clear, but at minimum, he seems to caution against distractingly flitting from one rabbinic discourse (*talmud*) to another, perhaps echoing his critique at b. Sanhedrin 24a of the unwieldly mixture that is Babylonian rabbinic learning, which instead of focusing on one corpus mixes, or constantly moves among, three different registers, thereby producing a confusing babel.

Jewish learning, which were ideally to be engaged with independently. Notably, this tradition appears to have evolved first from an earlier story preserved in Genesis Rabbah in which R. Yoḥanan explained a pupil's learning difficulties by referring to his origins in Borsippa, which was midrashically connected to the "language pit" of Babel where God confounded human language. That anecdote (or at least material similar to it) apparently developed into a tradition now preserved at tractate Sanhedrin 109a which expresses how the sites of linguistic confusion, Babel and Borsippa, were thought to constitute a bad sign for Torah learning. Finally, the statement at b. Sanhedrin 24a evolved from earlier iterations into a teaching that equates "Babylon" with Babylonian rabbinic learning, writ large, and criticizes such learning as a muddled mixture of Scripture, Mishnah, and "*talmud*."

The *talmud* of Babylonia or the Babylonian Talmud?

In this paper I have been careful to note how the tradition about Babylonian learning recorded at b. Sanhedrin 24a is merely *attributed* to R. Yoḥanan, as the evidence suggests that R. Yoḥanan did not himself articulate the idea that Babylonian learning is a mixture of Scripture, Mishnah, and *talmud*, rather this teaching evolved from earlier formulations attributed to him. I argued that the notion that Babylonian learning was somehow seen as collectively and uniquely different from Palestinian learning appears to be a development of the Babylonian Talmud, one which we should not attribute to the third-century Palestinian sage. As such, the statement about Babylonian learning as it is currently preserved at b. Sanhedrin 24a was apparently formulated in Babylonia at a *relatively* late (but unrecoverable) point during the Talmudic period. Perhaps relatedly, the above-quoted teaching which midrashically links "the *talmud*" to a sea incorporating streams of tradition, is preserved in the Midrash on Canticles, which is thought to have been compiled in the sixth or seventh century.[91] Together,

91 For a recent discussion of the provenance and dating of Canticles Rabbah, see Tamar Kadari, "The Amoraic Aggadic Midrashim," in *The Classic Rabbinic Liteature of Eretz Israel Introduction and Studies, Vol. I: An Introduction to Rabbinic Literature*, eds. Menahem I. Kahana et al. (Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi, 2018), 297–349 (319-325) (Hebrew). The Midrash on Proverbs which, as noted records, another iteration of this teaching, was compiled still later.

these and related teachings seem to reflect a growing sense that as the classical rabbinic period progressed, the form of learning sometimes known as *talmud* was expanding to the point that it had become formidable in size and scope, eliciting expressions of wonderment in some circles or, as we find in the pair of teachings attributed to R. Yoḥanan and R. Yirmiyah, criticism.

Although the precise referent of "Babylon" in the reworked tradition attributed to R. Yoḥanan (and "*talmud*" in R. Yirmiyah's juxtaposed statement) is impossible to determine, it is worth noting, if mainly for the purposes of reception history, that some medieval authorities read R. Yoḥanan's statement at b. Sanhedrin 24a, as, indeed, referring to the Bavli.[92] It goes without saying that the third-century Palestinian amora could not possibly be referring to a work which would not exist for centuries. And yet, if I am correct that R. Yoḥanan's teaching reflects a later (if indeterminably so) Babylonian reworking, perhaps together with R. Yirmiyah's statement, these two teachings may refer to Babylonian learning (*talmudah shel bavel*) as it began to take composite shape and crystallize into the work that would ultimately become the Babylonian Talmud.

To even gesture in that direction, we must further consider the denotation of the term "*talmud*" in classic rabbinic literature. Neither the Babylonian nor Palestinian Talmuds use such a term to explicitly refer to themselves as coherent and completed compilations, likely because at the time the traditions and discussions *comprising* the Talmud were composed, the Talmud did not exist as such. Thus, when the term "*talmud*" appears in these works it does not mean *the* Talmud or even

92 See for example, Tosafot, Avodah Zarah 19b s.v. *yeshalesh*; Qiddushin 30a, s.v. *lo*; and Sanhedrin 24a, s.v. *belulah*. This reading was suggested as a justification of the narrowing of the curriculum to focus solely on the Bavli, which, it could now be claimed, technically included Scripture, Mishnah, and *talmud*. For a discussion of the resulting neglect of Bible study in Jewish education, see Isaac Kalimi, *Fighting Over the Bible: Jewish Interpretation, Sectarianism and Polemic from Temple to Talmud and Beyond* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), pp. 17-45. The earliest iteration of such a view can be found in a responsum attributed to Natronai, a head of the geonic academic at Sura in the ninth century. See Natronai Gaon 39 (ed. Brody pp. 146-7). Note that Natronai seems to refer to a now-lost midrash which intersects both with the tradition attributed to R. Yohanan, and the metaphor of the "*talmud*" as a sea into which flow multiple streams of tradition, as we saw in the Midrash on Canticles.

anything like the Talmud as we now have it. Instead, until the middle of the amoraic period, "*talmud*" normally—but not always—means the rabbinic practice of biblical exegesis and is basically synonymous with "*midrash,*" while beginning in the third amoraic generation "*talmud*" usually denotes an established form of learning and analysis of the Mishnah and perhaps related tannaitic texts.[93] When the teaching at b. Sanhedrin 24a mentions "*talmud*" *within* the triplet "Scripture, Mishnah, and *talmud*," it probably refers to some kind of advanced Mishnah study.[94] On the other hand, the meaning of the term in the phrase "*talmud* of Babylonia" in the statement attributed to R. Yirmiyah which was meaningfully juxtaposed to R. Yoḥanan's teaching, is harder to discern, and for that reason, in this paper I have generally rendered it open-endedly as the *rabbinic discourse* of Babylonia.

But this is not the end of the story. At a later, difficult-to-determine point, the term "*talmud*" did, in fact, come to refer to *the* Talmud, or as the Geonim of Babylonia refer to the Babylonian Talmud, "*our* Talmud." Crucially, this shift is not merely one of nomenclature, rather a transformation from what was largely a textual *practice* to a relatively coherent, relatively crystallized textual *artifact* known as the Talmud. Again, during the years when R. Yoḥanan and R. Yirmiyah operated in amoraic Palestine, such a fully formed Talmudic artifact certainly did not yet exist. Yet, in the post-amoraic era, the term "*talmud*" could have referred to the beginnings of something like our Talmud. If, as I have suggested, the final form of the teaching attributed to R. Yoḥanan, juxtaposed to R. Yirmiyah's reference to the "*talmud* of Babylonia," is a late reworking, perhaps the passage *is* saying something about *the* Babylonian Talmud as it began to take shape, and not only the textual practice of *talmud* in Babylonia.

93 See Abraham Rosenthal, "Oral Torah and Torah from Sinai: Halakha and Praxis," in *Meḥqerei Talmud* 2 (eds. Moshe Bar-Asher and David Rosenthal; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1993), 448-487, (463-4, n. 48) (Hebrew).

94 Given how the focus of the teaching appears to be Babylonian learning of some sort, R. Yoḥanan's mention of "Scripture" probably means the study of Scripture, while the reference to "Mishnah" likely means the unadorned study or recitation of Mishnah.

While such a reading of the passage is speculative, it is notable that one of the distinguishing characteristics of the Babylonian Talmud is how it comprises a distinct *mixture* of sources that not infrequently has little or nothing to do with the scholastic practices of "*talmud*," as previously conceived. Of course, all rabbinic texts are anthological compilations that preserve prior and diverse collections of material. The Palestinian Talmud records a fair amount of aggadah and other kinds of material that are not in direct dialogue with the Mishnah. Yet, the extent and diversity of such "digressions" from the Mishnah is significantly lower than that which is found in the Bavli.[95] It would seem, then, that the Bavli has taken the rabbinic anthological impulse to its extreme, establishing a single and singular textual vehicle through which to record all sorts of materials deemed worthy of preservation. This quality of the Bavli may be contrasted with the multi-volumed library of rabbinic Palestine which, besides the Mishnah, comprises various *separate* works, including among other things the classic Palestinian amoraic Midrashim.[96] Although it only refers to Scripture, Mishnah, and "*talmud*," perhaps the passage at b. Sanhedrin 24a uses that established triad to highlight how the developing compilation of Babylonian learning, which would later become the Babylonian Talmud, is distinguished by its mixing.

95 I am currently engaged in a project to map all the material in the Bavli and Yerushalmi that is largely unconnected to the Mishnah and its interpretation. I intend to publish the results soon.

96 It is interesting in this sense to consider Genesis Rabbah 16:4, which names a group of independent rabbinic works that are said to correspond to the precious metals of the Land of Israel:
"The gold of that land is good"—this teaches that there is no Torah [learning] like the Land of Israel, and no wisdom like the wisdom of the Land of Israel; "Bdellium is there, and lapis lazuli"—Scripture, Mishnah, *talmud*, "Additions" (*tosefta*) and Aggadah.