

Separating Interpretation from the Text: Identification of Primary Versions

Rabin Shushtri

This paper examines a textual variant in the talmudic passage (B. Yoma 77) concerning a source for the statement that sexual relations are considered 'affliction' (*inui*). Three main versions of the sugya are found in the direct textual witnesses. Study of those variants suggests that this is not a case in which a single, original version was altered by scholars and scribes, as it is inconceivable that a scholar would have switched the question and answer so aggressively that no trace of them remained. Moreover, in the case of this variant a common element may be found in all three versions. My conclusion is thus that what the scholars had before them was a primary version (*girsat yesod*) which they interpreted in various ways. These interpretations of the primary version differ in their understanding of the sentence at issue and even disagree on its contextual role. Some read it as the answer to a question; others read it as fortifying the question. This example may be added to other similar instances in which scholars have surmised that the variants were generated by a primary version that branched into a number of versions. Philological examination enables us to separate interpretation from the reconstruction of the *sugya's* primary version.