Haroset
A Taste of Jewish History

Susan Weingarten

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The Toby Press

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In memory of my mother, who would have approved of this one

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Susan Weingarten

Jerusalem, Rosh HaShana 5779 – September 2018

Introduction: Texts and Tastes

> But when from a long-distant past nothing subsists, after the people are dead, after the things are broken and scattered, still, alone, more fragile, but with more vitality, more unsubstantial, more persistent, more faithful, the smell and taste of things remain poised a long time, like souls, ready to remind us, waiting and hoping for their moment, amid the ruins of all the rest: and bear unfaltering, in the tiny and almost impalpable drop of their essence, the vast structure of recollection.
>
> Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*[1]

For around two thousand years, Jews have celebrated the Passover Seder in their homes every spring, using texts and tastes to join themselves to their history. The Seder commemorates the Exodus of the Children of Israel from slavery in Egypt to freedom. It is a dramatic ritual that includes reading the text of the Passover Haggada, pointing out and eating symbolic foods and drinking four symbolic cups of wine.

Unlike the other symbolic Passover foods, haroset has always been something of a mystery. It was not one of the three original symbolic foods eaten at the first Passover in Egypt. It first appears in the

1. Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past: Swann's Way* (=*À la recherche du temps perdu: du côté de chez Swann*), trans. C. K. Scott-Moncrieff (New York: Random House, 1934), 36.

Mishna, but with no explanation of why, and with few details of what it was made of or what it tasted like. The Talmuds tell us that haroset was said to resemble the mud or clay for the bricks made by the Children of Israel as slaves in Egypt, so it was clearly connected to the story of the redemption from an early stage, but we do not know when it arrived at the Seder.[2] It seems to have been introduced to counteract the bitter herbs, which have been part of the Passover meal since the time of the Exodus.

Throughout the generations, in fact, the rabbis have given different and sometimes contradictory explanations of haroset. This book is my attempt to solve the riddle of the origins of haroset – when and why it appeared, what it was made of and how it changed over the generations.

PASSOVER FOODS AND JEWISH IDENTITY

Eating and experiencing food involves all our senses, especially smell and taste. Thus the power of eating to conjure up memory is great. Perhaps the most famous modern literary example is an episode in Marcel Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past.* There the narrator takes a *petite madeleine*, a little cake, dips it in his tea and eats it, and the taste and smell conjure up overwhelming memories of his childhood.

I do not know whether Proust, an assimilated Jew, ever took part in a Passover Seder. But long before he wrote, eating symbolic foods on Passover was deliberately used to summon up memories. Long before the Haggada was written, the biblical Book of Exodus tells us exactly what foods were to be eaten at the first Passover meal, the meal eaten in haste before the Jews left Egypt (Ex. 12:1–11). First and foremost was the paschal lamb, to be eaten together with matza, the unleavened bread that is called the "bread of affliction," and *maror*, bitter herbs. These clearly relate to the bitterness of the life the Israelites led in Egypt, as described earlier in Exodus (1:13–14):

2. The Hebrew word I have translated here as clay or mud, *teet*, is usually translated into English as "mortar," which is used to stick bricks together, rather than the mud or clay used to make the bricks, which is clearly what the rabbis meant.

> And Egypt made the children of Israel to serve with rigour. And they made their lives bitter with hard bondage, in mortar, and in brick, and in all manner of bondage in the field.[3]

Detailed instructions are also given for how to prepare the food (Ex. 12:1–11), and then the text adds:

> And this day shall be unto you for a memorial; and you shall keep it as a feast to the Lord; throughout your generations shall you keep it as a feast by an ordinance forever. (Ex. 12:14)

The biblical Passover feast is thus intended to create a historical memory in the future. The Israelites leaving slavery for freedom are to establish their new identity with the foods of the Passover meal.[4]

"Tell me what you eat and I will tell you who you are," said the nineteenth-century French philosopher Brillat-Savarin. Thus in the Book of Exodus, every family of the People of Israel is instructed to take the "abomination of Egypt," later specified as a lamb. Jews are to show themselves as *not* Egyptian: they are to sacrifice the lamb, sprinkle its blood on the threshold of their houses, roast it and eat it. Eating the meat of the lamb signified their freedom from the Egyptians. The text makes it clear how important this is in creating a Jewish identity. In the future, each Jewish family is instructed to take their lamb to the place ordained by God (later identified with the Temple in Jerusalem), offer it as a sacrifice and eat it with bitter herbs and matza:

> Thou shalt therefore sacrifice the passover [offering] unto the Lord thy God … in the place which the Lord shall choose to place

---

3. This translation has been taken from the adaptation of the Authorized Version by Harold Fisch in *The Jerusalem Bible* (Jerusalem: Koren, 1989). Fisch uses Hebrew transliterations for proper names, but I have preferred the English versions which are still perhaps more familiar to an English-speaking audience.
4. See on this: Georg Schäfer and Susan Weingarten, "Celebrating Purim and Passover: Food and Memory in the Creation of Jewish Identity," in *Celebration: Proceedings of the Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery 2011*, ed. M. McWilliams (Totnes: Prospect Books, 2012), 316–25.

> His name there. Thou shalt eat no leavened bread with it; seven days shalt thou eat unleavened bread with it, the bread of affliction … *that thou mayest remember* the day when thou camest out of the land of Egypt all the days of thy life. (Deut. 16:1f., my italics)

After the destruction of the Temple, Jews stopped sacrificing lambs, but continued to eat matza and bitter herbs, each family in its own home. Thus the celebration of Passover, with its distinctive foods prescribed by the Bible, became an integral part of being Jewish.

The biblical text telescopes past, present and future. The words are addressed to Israel in an uncertain future, "in the place which the Lord shall choose," about the past deliverance which is to be remembered all the days of their lives. The specific foods of Passover are being used here to create memory – prospectively. As the antiquated "thou" of the translation tells us, the instruction, while addressed to the whole Jewish people, is given in the singular. Every Jew is to see her- or himself as if s/he was personally redeemed from Egypt. Each individual thus becomes a representative of the communal whole, whose personal memories represent the memory of the whole people.

I am not aware of any other ancient textual evidence of using food in this sort of symbolic way before the rise of Christianity. Judaism is unusual in this regard. But over time various cultures have used food as a means of underlining memories. Recently, the anthropologist David Sutton has explored the relationship between food and memory on a modern Greek island in his book *Remembrance of Repasts*.[5] He discusses the use of ritual acts of eating in creating memory, and in particular prospective memory. He distinguishes between "inscribed memory," written records, and "incorporated memory," which results from a "performance" involving eating. Many of Sutton's Greek islanders are now scattered throughout their own diaspora, and the memories conjured up by food serve to remind them of an entire cultural world they have lost. This is an experience very similar to the much longer Jewish experience of loss and diaspora.

5. David E. Sutton, *Remembrance of Repasts: An Anthropology of Food and Memory* (Berg: Oxford/New York, 2001).

These concepts of food and memory will aid us in looking at haroset: the biblical and rabbinic injunctions as part of the process of creating prospective memory; the part played by both inscribed and incorporated memories; and the construction of a Jewish cultural world in the Diaspora. Haroset has been eaten by Jews as part of the rituals of Passover for generations, throughout many countries in the Diaspora. And the rabbis who write about haroset in the Talmud from the very first describe it too as a memory or memorial, *zekher*. As we look at its development, we shall return to these concepts of food and memory to examine how it is related to individual and community memories.

THE HISTORY OF HAROSET

It is only recently that historians have become aware of how much the history of food and its preparation can contribute to the study of general history. What people ate and how they prepared it was, and still is, an important part of how people lived. In this book, I shall be tracing the history of haroset and exploring how its development over time contributed a chapter to Jewish history – a longer and more complex chapter than we might have thought.

After the destruction of the Second Temple in the year 70 CE, a gap opened at the heart of Judaism. Until then, Jews had centered their worship of God on His Temple in Jerusalem. Now this was no more. The rabbis thus set about re-creating Judaism. Temple rituals were moved to synagogue and home, including the rituals of Passover. Judaism was re-centered on the study of texts constructed by the rabbis for posterity in the talmudic literature, the Mishna, Tosefta, Talmuds and Midrashim.[6] These texts recorded rabbinical debates and exegesis; they were written and rewritten, collated and edited over the centuries after the destruction of the Temple, in the Land of Israel and in the Babylonian Diaspora. Ever since that time, all rabbinic discussions refer back to the talmudic literature as their foundational reference point. The written text, surrounded by commentaries, replaced the Temple as the focal point of Judaism. This new center was portable and it accompanied the Jews throughout their dispersion.

6. You will find an explanation of what the Mishna, Tosefta, Talmuds and other sources are in the next chapter.

This situation held good until what may be seen as the second revolution in Judaism, the Enlightenment. This movement proposed substituting rational and scientific thought for tradition and faith. Until then, Jewish writing had been almost entirely the preserve of the rabbis. From then on we are witness to new kinds of Jewish literature – secular, rationalist, historicizing, belletristic. Rabbinical literature, however, does not cease, and while the main stream of textual study and commentary continues, we also find other channels of expression – mystical, messianic but also rationalist.

The history of haroset and its development reflect these patterns of Jewish history. I shall trace the development of haroset from its unclear origins in the Land of Israel to its presence today wherever in the world there is a Jewish community. Haroset probably already existed toward the end of the time of the Second Temple, when the Land of Israel was under Roman domination. Some customs of the Seder, like the requirement to "recline" while eating, have parallels in Greek and Roman banquets. Can we perhaps find anything like haroset in a Roman cookery book?

I shall begin my narrative looking in detail at the talmudic sources, which form the basis for later rabbinical discussions of haroset. Until modern times, after all, it has been mainly the rabbis who were concerned with recording and recommending what went into haroset.

The rabbis of the Mishna, who are the first to mention haroset by name, tell us almost nothing about it. It was clearly by that time (the beginning of the third century CE) a part of the Passover Seder, but we are left in the dark as to how it arrived or what it represented, and there is only the slightest hint of what it was made of. By talmudic times (roughly the fourth to the seventh centuries CE), however, rabbis in both the Land of Israel and in Babylonia were recorded discussing with one another how to make it, and what it symbolized.

This interest continued through the ages, with many rabbis suggesting recipes for haroset and the proper way to make it. Often they disagreed, and sometimes they changed their minds, and ordinary people clearly did not always follow the rabbis' recommendations.

By looking at haroset in this way, we shall see how its ingredients changed, and with them its taste; today it is almost invariably sweet, but at other times it was sweet-and-sour, bitter, or even just sour. Sour

tastes were very popular in Europe in the Middle Ages, for example, and I shall try and relate the changes in haroset to the wider historical and geographical context.

As the Jews moved through the different countries of the Diaspora, different ingredients became more or less available, and the rabbis were often forced to endorse new ingredients in retrospect. By the Middle Ages, the generations of rabbis called the Tosafists were recommending the inclusion of fruits mentioned in the Song of Songs that symbolized the Jewish people. The story of haroset became intimately linked to this beautiful biblical book. I will look closely at the fruits, nuts and spices of the Song of Songs, and what they symbolized.

European Christians of the Middle Ages – the so-called Dark Ages – were often antagonistic to Jews and highly suspicious of their customs. Eastertide reminded them of the crucifixion of Jesus, and their anger was often directed at local Jewish communities. In particular, the long incomprehensible Hebrew rituals and the strange and unidentifiable foods of the Seder held around this time of the year seem to have become extremely suspect in their eyes. We shall see how haroset, often diluted with red wine or vinegar, became connected to the terrible accusations of the blood libels.

Much of the information about haroset can be gained from medieval and modern commentaries on the Talmud, or explanations of the text of the Passover Haggada. Apart from these commentaries, there is other literature about haroset: medieval and modern poetry, novels and short stories. The romantic German Jewish poet Heinrich Heine is justly famous for his description of *cholent,* the heavy Sabbath stew, but he also wrote about haroset, as did the American Jewish dramatist David Mamet.

In the Middle Ages, a new tradition of illustrating Haggadas began, which continues to this day, and the pictures and their captions tell us yet more about how haroset was made and distributed. These enhance the educational effectiveness of the Seder – parents telling the story to their children. Over the ages, almost every educational device possible has been used to keep the children's interest high through the long night, but word plays and games with language also form a serious part of the story of haroset.

The twentieth and twenty-first centuries have brought about many changes in foodways all over the world. Today there seems to be a never-ending search for novelty, for new tastes. How has this movement affected haroset? And what about the counter-movement, the search for "authenticity"?

When writing about food in the twenty-first century, we cannot avoid the gender aspects. While preparing food in the home has been almost entirely the province of women throughout history, haroset was, and still is, often made by men. Why?

Finally, I have interviewed a number of women and men from different Jewish communities for this book. Each of them told me about his or her family origins, and how they (or their husbands or wives) make their version of haroset. The younger women often sent me to their mothers or mothers-in-law for more information. I conclude with their very different recipes, and my gratitude.

Chapter 1

On the Origins of Haroset

> We are in Jerusalem in the springtime. The air is clear, the countryside still green after the winter rains. The Temple glints gold and white from the top of Mount Moriah. The streets are crowded with tired and thirsty pilgrims, bleating sheep, excited children. And among the sounds of the city we hear the spice merchants crying their wares: "Come buy your spices for the mitzva."

Even if my picture above of Passover in ancient Jerusalem owes something to my imagination, the cries of the spice merchants appear in both the Jerusalem and Babylonian Talmuds. R. Elazar b. Tzadok, who lived in Jerusalem when the Temple still stood, quoted these words of the spice sellers as proof that haroset was considered to be a mitzva, a religious requirement, and not just a custom.[1] This is the first hint we have of haroset – a vivid phrase that conjures up the smell and taste of the Jewish past.

1. Pesaḥim 116a; Y. Pesaḥim 37d.

THE CREATION OF THE SEDER

As we noted in the introduction, following the destruction of the Second Temple in the year 70 CE, Jews were no longer able to celebrate Passover by going on pilgrimage to Jerusalem and eating the traditional foods in the Temple courts. A vacuum was left at the heart of Judaism. The rabbis, concerned with the survival of the Jewish people, worked to reinstitute Judaism in new forms. Thus the ancient Passover Temple rituals were reconstructed as the Seder meal which took place in every Jewish home, following the text of the Haggada. "Haggada" means narrative, and by narrating to his family the story of the slavery and redemption of the Jews in Egypt, the head of every Jewish household was now actively and personally involved in ensuring the survival of the religion and its traditions.

Since the Seder ritual was new and important, the rabbis were concerned with getting it right; from the very first time the legal codes were written down we find long and detailed discussions of it among the laws of Passover. These Passover laws get a whole tractate to themselves, Pesaḥim, in the Mishna, the early code of Jewish law, and in the subsequent Jerusalem and Babylonian Talmuds. Although the extent of the rabbis' influence over their Jewish contemporaries at this time is disputed,[2] their directions for the Passover Seder took deep root among Jews and are followed to this day.

While the Temple still stood, Jews would come on pilgrimage to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover, sacrificing the paschal lamb in the courts of the Temple and eating it there in Jerusalem with matza and bitter herbs. Many Jews would even come from abroad to Jerusalem, although clearly not everyone could come from far away. So how did they celebrate Passover? And what happened in the Land of Israel after the destruction of the Temple, but before the rabbis instituted the Seder at home? When was the Haggada written? It is difficult to answer these questions. But it is clear that the Passover Haggada as we have it today must have changed and developed over time, for it differs in places from

2. Seth Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society 200 BCE–640 CE: Jews, Christians and Muslims from the Ancient to the Modern World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

the instructions about Passover in the Mishna and the Tosefta.[3] Several fragments of early Haggadas from around the tenth century have survived in the Cairo Genizah, and these too show different customs from our present day Haggada. Thus there is a gap in our knowledge of the celebration of Passover from Temple times to the Haggada as we have it today.

The beginnings of haroset fall somewhere in this gap. Scholars differ as to whether it is possible to reconstruct any of the lost early narrative from the later sources. Can we read back any of the practices of the Haggada into earlier periods? I shall try to do this here, with due caution, noting difficulties as I come across them.

Haroset was undoubtedly a food of ordinary people, and it might even have been an everyday food at one time. It is possible that haroset was the Hebrew name of a Greco-Roman food in common use, called *embamma*. The Seder after all, in its reinvention by the rabbis after the destruction of the Temple, seems to have been built, at least in part, on the model of a Greco-Roman *symposium* meal. Thus I will be using contemporaneous Greco-Roman sources as part of my attempted reconstruction. But haroset differs from most other everyday foods in that it was singled out and used as one of the symbolic foods on the Passover Seder table. I shall now go back to look at what our earliest sources have to say about it.

What Are Talmudic Sources?

Since the earliest information about haroset is found in the talmudic sources, and many later rabbis refer back to them, a brief explanation of what they are seems in place here for the uninitiated. Apart from the laws written in the Bible, Jewish tradition has additional laws. These were originally preserved orally, but eventually written down in a collection called the Mishna, which was finally edited at the beginning of the third century CE by Rabbi Judah HaNasi – Rabbi Judah the Prince or Patriarch – the leader of the Jewish community at the time. The Mishna received its final form in the Land of Israel, the Roman province

3. For explanations of the Mishna and Tosefta, see below: "What Are Talmudic Sources?"

of *Palaestina*, at the same time the Greek writer Athenaeus of Naucratis was writing his book on the Greco-Roman *symposium, The Deipnosophists* (The Philosophers at Dinner), in Egypt or, perhaps, in Rome itself.

The laws found in the Mishna cover many aspects of everyday life. However, they are written very concisely. So further explanation was needed, and a body of legal and moral discussion and commentary on the Mishna grew up. Eventually, this too was written down by rabbis in both the Land of Israel and in Babylonia around the fifth and seventh centuries respectively, to become the Talmud Yerushalmi and the Talmud Bavli, the Jerusalem (or Palestinian) and Babylonian Talmuds. These quote the Mishna sentence by sentence, together with the talmudic commentary on it, the Gemara. In the Land of Israel, there were other legal compilations called *baraitot* (singular *baraita*) such as the Tosefta. There are also further rabbinic commentaries from these times, often on books of the Bible, called Midrashim. Since not everyone could understand the Hebrew, the talmudic literature often used the local Jewish language, Aramaic, with a sprinkling of Greek words.

The rabbis of the Mishna and the Tosefta are called *Tanna'im*, while the rabbis of the Talmud are *Amora'im*. The later *Geonim* commented on the Talmud in Babylonia.

Rabbis did not always agree with each other, and their debates form the main body of the text. Many of their discussions are related to food. Talmudic literature was written in the same world as Greco-Roman or Persian literature, but it differs in one important respect. The non-Jewish literature was written by aristocrats for aristocrats – no one else could read or write – who were not interested in how food was prepared. This was the province of women and slaves. These upper-class men were interested only in finished products, and in luxury products in particular. Talmudic rabbis, on the other hand, were interested in every aspect of daily life in order to bring it under religious control. Often very poor themselves, they provided a good source of information about the everyday food of ordinary people.

Haroset in the Mishna

As we have noted, Passover is mentioned in the Bible, together with the eating of lamb, unleavened bread (matza) and bitter herbs (*maror*), but

not haroset (Ex. 12:8). The first written evidence of haroset under its own name is found in Mishna Pesaḥim, which deals with rabbinic regulations about Passover. However, haroset is merely mentioned here, with no further details about its function, symbolism, ingredients or taste:

> They bring before [the leader of the Seder] unleavened bread (matza) and lettuce and the haroset, even though haroset is not a religious obligation (mitzva).
>
> R. Elazar b. Tzadok says: 'It *is* a religious obligation.'" (Mishna Pesaḥim 10:3)

A similar passage about haroset appears in the Tosefta (Pesaḥim 10:9). R. Elazar appears to have been a merchant who lived in Jerusalem before the destruction of the Temple (Tosefta Beitza 3:8). There are traditions about him in later literature, but it is not always easy to determine how far these are original traditions and how far they have been edited by later authors. Thus the Babylonian Talmud quotes R. Elazar as saying that merchants would cry the spices for haroset in the streets of Jerusalem, calling: "Come buy your spices for the mitzva [of haroset]" (Pesaḥim 116a).[4] The earlier Jerusalem Talmud had cited *tagarei Yerushalayim*, the merchants of Jerusalem, crying their spices (Y. Pesaḥim 37d). These texts suggest that Jews must have been eating haroset in Jerusalem together with their roast lamb and unleavened bread and bitter herbs *before* the Temple was destroyed. However, Tosefta Pisḥa writes of R. Elazar and the merchants of Lod (Lydda), a city in Judea, rather than Jerusalem. Perhaps, then, he was talking about the time *after* the destruction of the Temple (Tosefta Pisḥa 10:10).[5] In that case, the Mishna's discussion

4. I have translated this as "buy," though the literal meaning of the text is "take." However there are those who would disagree. Rabbi David, the grandson of Maimonides, for example, writes that the merchants were offering spices free. Dr. Don Krisst has suggested to me that this may have been ironic on the part of Rabbi David, given the high prices of spices at the time.
5. Here R. Elazar is quoted as saying to some merchants of Lod, "Come, buy your spices for the mitzva [of haroset]": S. Friedman, *Tosefta Atikta* (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 2002), 421–38. Friedman thinks that in this case the Tosefta ante-dates the Mishna, and the commoner "Jerusalem" was substituted for "Lod."

about whether or not haroset is a mitzva may indicate that this was a new element, which belonged to the rabbis' re-creation of the Passover rituals as the Seder held in every Jewish home, rather than something that stretched back to Passover in the Temple. Either way, R. Elazar certainly saw spices as an essential ingredient of haroset.

The Mishna continues, in words similar to those quoted today at every Passover Seder by the youngest child present: "On all other nights we dip our food once, on this night we dip twice" (Mishna Pesaḥim 10:4). The Mishna refers here to the everyday practice throughout the Roman Empire, among Jews and non-Jews alike, of dipping bread into a condiment at a meal (among the poorest this was sometimes the entire meal). But at the Seder, it says, we dip twice. Today, at the Seder, we first dip herbs into salt water, and then later, bitter herbs into haroset. In earlier times, herbs may have been ritually dipped into haroset twice at the Seder.[6] This custom seems to have persisted in some places until the early Middle Ages, when the *Or Zarua* disapproved of eating haroset before the second dipping with the bitter herbs.[7]

The bitter herbs themselves are specified in the Mishna: "And these are the herbs by [eating] which at Passover a man fulfills the mitzva: *ḥazeret, olshin, tamkha, ḥarḥavina* and *maror*" (Mishna Pesaḥim 2:6). The Jerusalem Talmud clarifies two of these terms, explaining that *ḥazeret* is *ḥasa*, i.e. lettuce, while *olshin* is translated by the Greek words *entubin*, endives, or *troximon*, which refers to the raw vegetable salad that accompanied a meal. Lettuce was clearly bitter in those days, like wild lettuce is today. Neither the Mishna, nor the Tosefta, nor the Jerusalem Talmud explicitly says that the bitter herbs should be dipped

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He proposes that Tosefta Pisḥa refers to a time *after* the destruction, when the rabbis assembled in Lod, rather than Jerusalem, as recorded in Tosefta Pisḥa 3:11. However, Friedman does not discuss the evidence of Tosefta Beitza that R. Elazar was "a merchant in Jerusalem all the days of his life."

6. Friedman (above, n. 5), *loc. cit.* Probably the ordinary herbs were first dipped into haroset too, instead of salt water, as today: J. Tabory, *JPS Commentary on the Haggadah: Historical Introduction, Translation and Commentary* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2008), 23–4.
7. He compared this practice with sleeping with one's betrothed before the wedding. Rabbi Isaac ben Moses, *Or Zarua*, ed. A. Marienberg (Jerusalem: Yeshivat Or Etzion, 2006).

into haroset, but this practice can be inferred from the Jerusalem Talmud and the later, more explicit discussion in the Babylonian Talmud (Y. Pesaḥim 37c–d; Pesaḥim 115a).

There is no discussion, however, in the Mishna of what haroset is. People were obviously expected to know. It is clear that haroset, though given special symbolic status at the Passover Seder, was in fact eaten all the year round, not just at Passover. We find instructions in Mishna Pesaḥim (2:8) that flour should not be added to haroset (or to mustard) on Passover in case they fermented and became *ḥametz*, leaven. The Babylonian Talmud mentions a special vessel for preparing haroset, called the *beit ḥaroset*, although it is unclear whether this existed in Palestine as well (Pesaḥim 30b). In the time of the Mishna, Jews were allowed to use most everyday crockery on Passover if it had been used for cold food only and then been cleaned. Use of the *beit ḥaroset*, however (as well as the *beit se'or*, the pot where sour dough was fermented for leavened bread), was forbidden "because it (the acidic haroset) also ferments very strongly" (Pesaḥim 114b), and both these pots were too difficult to clean properly.[8] Thus this everyday version of haroset apparently contained flour, which fermented and produced *ḥametz*, forbidden, of course, on Passover.

An Earlier Hint of Haroset?

Paradoxically, it is not the Mishna, a Jewish text, which has the earliest possible allusion to haroset, but a Christian one. The New Testament predated the third-century Mishna, and the famous "Last Supper" eaten by Jesus and his disciples before the crucifixion was most probably the Passover meal. Indeed, to this day, there are Christians who, wishing to re-create Jesus' experience, eat a form of Seder meal at Eastertide.

The Gospel of Matthew is considered by scholars to be the closest of all the Gospels to Jewish roots. It was probably written toward the end of the first century. It writes:

> And the disciples did as Jesus had appointed them; and they made ready the passover.

8. Perhaps they were made of wood.

> Now when the even was come, he sat down with the twelve [disciples]; and as they did eat he said, "Verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me."
>
> And they were exceeding sorrowful, and began every one of them to say unto him, "Lord, is it I?"
>
> And he answered and said, "He that dippeth his hand with me in the dish, the same will betray me." (Matt. 26:19–23)

Three verses later, the Gospel notes that Jesus "took bread and blessed it and brake it," so the dipping in a dish mentioned in the text is unlikely to refer to the common ancient practice of dipping bread into a condiment. It seems to be a separate dipping. Could the writer of the Gospel possibly be referring to dipping bitter herbs into haroset?

As noted, it is not clear from the Mishna whether haroset was used for dipping before the destruction of the Temple, or whether this practice began when the rabbis re-created the Passover Seder. If Jesus and his disciples did, in fact, dip bitter herbs into haroset, this would bring us back to the time when the Temple still stood. However, here too the evidence is unclear. The Gospel of Matthew was written some time after the destruction of the Temple; we cannot know whether the author is using a genuine tradition of what really happened at the Last Supper, or whether he is describing the ritual of the Seder meal he knew from his own times. If the tradition was authentic, Matthew's account would be our earliest allusion to dipping bitter herbs in haroset.

There is further Christian evidence about bitter herbs at the Last Supper, this time from the Church Father Jerome, writing in Bethlehem in the fourth century, around the time of the Jerusalem Talmud. Jerome had Jewish teachers and often shows that he knew their customs well. He translated much of the Bible from Hebrew, and the New Testament from Greek into the Latin Vulgate. In his Latin translation of the Gospel of Matthew, Jerome, surprisingly, translated the New Testament's Greek word for the "dish" Jesus and Judas dipped into, *tryblion*, with another Greek word, *paropsis.* The latter term usually refers to a little side dish that held appetizers and sauce, *embamma.*[9] The word *paropsis*

9. Athenaeus, *Deipnosophists* ix, 368a, quoting Xenophon, *Cyropaedeia* i.3.4.

is also used for the food itself, and was used in particular to refer to bitter foods like edible bulbs – *bolboi* – and stalks.[10] Jerome's deliberate translation implies the use of bitter herbs and sauces. Is this because he had a tradition from the time of the New Testament, or was he writing from his knowledge of what contemporary Jews did at Passover? Sadly, we lack conclusive evidence.

HAROSET IN THE TALMUDS

Both Talmuds contain tractates that expand on Mishna Pesaḥim and provide more detail about haroset. Many later concepts of haroset look back to the talmudic discussions, particularly those in the Babylonian Talmud.

Haroset in the Jerusalem Talmud

In a passage from around the fifth century, the Jerusalem Talmud adds to the description of the Seder in the Mishna, which had specified the special foods brought before the leader of the Seder, including haroset. It now discusses an alternative name for haroset, its texture and its symbolism:

> They bring before [the leader of the Seder] unleavened bread (matza) and bitter lettuce (*ḥazeret*) and the haroset…
>
> The people of the house of Issi [said] in the name of Issi: "And why is [haroset] called by the name of *dukkeh*? Because she pounds (*dakhah*) [it] with (him/them/it) [corrupt text]."
>
> R. Joshua b. Levi said: "It must be thick. That is, in memory of clay."
>
> Another *Tanna* teaches: "It must be soft [or runny]. That is, in memory of blood." (Y. Pesaḥim 37d)

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10. A. Dalby, *Food in the Ancient World from A to Z* (London, 2003), 118; 212, who quotes Athenaeus ii 63d–64f. See also ix 367c–368c. *Bulbusin* (=*bolboi*) appear in the talmudic literature. See Y. Feliks, *Tractate Shevi'it*, vol. 2 (Jerusalem, 1986), 451–3, who also identifies them in Y. Demai 22c. *Bolboi* are still eaten in rural Greece and Italy: A. F. Buccini, "The Bitter – and Flatulent – Aphrodisiac: Synchrony and Diachrony of the Culinary Use of *Muscari Comosum* in Greece and Italy," in *Vegetables: Proceeding of the Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery 2008*, ed. S. R. Friedland (Totnes: Prospect Books, 2009), 46–55.

Having listed haroset among the special foods, the Jerusalem Talmud notes that haroset is called *dukkeh,* and asks why. The answer given is that this is because it is pounded (*dukhah*). It is interesting to note that the Vilna Gaon, the famous eighteenth-century Rabbi Elijah of Vilna, wrote about the use of the root D-V-KH, from the verb meaning "to pound," in his description of making haroset.[11] He saw it as an allusion to the manna, which the Children of Israel pounded in a mortar (*medokhah*) before baking: *"Dakhu bamedokhah"* (Num. 11:7–9). The Torah tells us that manna, the miraculous total food that fell from heaven, was as sweet as "wafers with honey." It was provided by God after the Exodus from Egypt, and throughout the forty years His people remained in the wilderness (Ex. 16:1–36). Thus, for the Vilna Gaon at least, there is an allusion in the haroset to the mercy of God, symbolized as a sweet heavenly food.

The name *dukkeh* for haroset has survived to the present day. Jews from Yemen – who were cut off for many centuries from other Jewish communities, and had no access to the Babylonian Talmud – relied on the Jerusalem Talmud as their religious authority. To this day, the Yemenite Jewish community in Israel calls haroset *dukkeh.* (When Naomi Gozi gave me her mother Hamama's recipe for haroset, found in chapter 6, she noted specifically that the Yemenites still call it *dukkeh.*)

Yemenite Jews also have an interesting interpretation of another aspect of haroset. I noted that the Jerusalem Talmud text above was corrupt. It can be read to say that "it (a feminine pronoun referring to haroset) is pounded with it (a masculine pronoun, referring to the bitter herbs)," and some medieval rabbis, in fact, recommended making haroset with pounded bitter herbs. But other rabbis, and in particular those of Yemenite origin, read the passage as "She pounds with him," and say that a husband and wife should make haroset together.[12]

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11. Rabbi Elijah ben Solomon Zalman of Vilna (1720–1797), *Biurei Aggadot* on Berakhot 57b (Jerusalem: unknown publisher, 1971), 45.
12. See on this the authoritative Yemenite rabbi in his edition of the Passover Haggada: Y. Kappah, ed., *Sefer Aggadeta DePisḥa* (Jerusalem: HaAguda LeHatzalat Ginzei Teiman, 1958).

The Jerusalem Talmud goes on to discuss the texture of haroset. R. Joshua b. Levi, a third-century rabbi from the Land of Israel, is quoted as saying that the haroset must be thick like mud or clay. Haroset with this texture would thus evoke the clay used by the Children of Israel for making bricks, described in the Book of Exodus, when they were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt. The anonymous *Tanna*, however, disagrees, teaching that haroset should be soft (or runny) "in memory of the blood." It is unclear what blood this recalls. Blood from the Passover lamb was used by the Jews to mark their houses before they left Egypt. They dipped bunches of the pungent herb called hyssop into it and painted it on the lintels of their houses as a sign for the Destroyer to *pass over* them and spare their children (Ex. 12:21–3). However, the blood may also refer to the first of the Ten Plagues in the Book of Exodus, during which all the water in Egypt turned to blood (Ex. 7:20f.). (Later generations saw more sinister associations of haroset with blood.) Thus the Jerusalem Talmud has two competing symbolisms for haroset: clay and blood, both memories of different aspects of the Egyptian slavery.[13]

Haroset in the Babylonian Talmud

The Babylonian Talmud, finalized around the seventh century, first expands upon an earlier statement in Mishna Pesaḥim 10:3, which discusses dipping the bitter lettuce, but does not specify what it is dipped into:

> Rav Pappa said, "This lettuce, you must plunge it in the haroset, because of *kappa* …"
>
> [But others disagree:] "You do not need to plunge it in, because *kappa* is destroyed by the smell"…
>
> Rav Pappa also said, "A person should not leave the bitter herbs (*maror*) in the haroset, just in case the sweetness of the spice destroys its bitterness." (Pesaḥim 114a–116a)

13. These were finally reconciled in the Middle Ages by the Tosafist Rabbi Jacob ben Judah Hazan MiLondres, *Etz Ḥayim*, ed. I Brodie (Jerusalem: Mosad HaRav Kook, 1962–67), as we shall see in chapter 3.

R. Pappa, a Babylonian rabbi of the fourth century, often appears in talmudic discussions of food (he is also reported to have been a fat man).[14] According to him, the lettuce used as bitter herbs contained a harmful element known as *kappa*. It is unclear from the text precisely what *kappa* is. Various medieval commentators explained it as unhealthy juices or some form of insect. But it may also have been an evil spirit. Later in the talmudic text, we hear of antidotes to *kappa* in different vegetables: "The *kappa* of lettuce is counteracted by radishes, the *kappa* of radishes by leeks, the *kappa* of leeks by hot water; the *kappa* of all these by hot water." These would make *kappa* sound like harmful juices, were it not for the cryptic spell offered by the Talmud if you have no *kappa* antidote handy: "Let him say thus: *kappa*, *kappa*, I remember you and your seven daughters and eight daughters-in-law" (Pesaḥim 116a). This makes *kappa* sound more like a demon or an evil spirit. Later kabbalistic rabbis gave all sorts of symbolic meanings to the mother with her seven daughters and eight daughters-in-law, but these need not detain us here.[15] I should just note that the Babylonian Talmud is very often particularly concerned with demons and spirits, so this may be a later Babylonian addition, rather than part of the earlier concepts.[16]

R. Pappa, then, believes that the bitter herbs should be dipped in the haroset in order to counteract the *kappa,* but he specifies that they should not be left there, as this would destroy their bitterness. Presumably, this opinion is the origin of the custom among present-day Jews who came from Germany not to eat haroset at all. They merely dip the bitter herbs and then eat them, after shaking off any haroset adhering to them.[17]

14. In antiquity, when many people subsisted just above starvation, being fat was regarded as an advantage. But see also: D. Boyarin, "The Talmud as a Fat Rabbi: A Novel Approach," *Text & Talk* 5 (2008): 603–19.
15. *Biurei Aggadot* (above, n. 11), 44–5.
16. See G. Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).
17. Informants: Prof Aharon Oppenheimer; Ruti Rosenblatt (below, chapter 6), and see: https://www.koltorah.org/halachah/the-mitzvah-of-charoset-by-rabbi-chaim-jachter (accessed April 2018).

The Babylonian Talmud then turns to the statement of the Mishna about bringing matza, bitter lettuce and haroset to the leader of the Seder, discussed in the Jerusalem Talmud:

> R. Shimi bar Ashi said: "[You should put] matza in front of each one [of the participants at the Seder], *maror* (bitter herbs) before each one, and haroset before each one"...
>
> But R. Huna said: "Each of these things [should be] in front of the one who recites the Haggada."
>
> And the ruling is according to R. Huna. (Pesaḥim 116a)

Here the Babylonian rabbis are concerned with how many portions of matza, bitter herbs and haroset were required at the Seder, and they rule that only one was necessary, for the leader of the Seder. They then carry on to consider whether haroset is a mitzva, citing the mishna we have seen with R. Elazar b. Tzadok's evidence. Finally, they come to the question, debated in the Jerusalem Talmud, of what haroset signifies. Their version differs somewhat:

> What is the mitzva?
>
> R. Levi says, "In memory of the apple."
>
> But R. Yohanan says, "In memory of the clay."
>
> Abbaye says, "Therefore you have to make it acidic and to make it thick." (Pesaḥim 116a)[18]

A number of midrashim and commentaries make it clear that the apple mentioned by R. Levi refers to a verse from the biblical Song of Songs (8:5): "I roused thee under the apple tree. There thy mother was in travail with thee; there she who bore thee was in travail." This apple tree

18. The printed versions of the Talmud have here: "Make it acidic, in memory of the apple. And you must make it thick in memory of the clay." This seems to be a comment by Rashi which got interpolated in the text, as it is missing in the manuscripts. See R. N. N. Rabbinowicz, *Dikdukei Soferim* (München: A. Huber, K. Hof Buchdrucker, 1874), vol. 6, on Pesaḥim 116a.

is also the subject of a beautiful midrash about the Children of Israel in Egypt, which I will look at more closely below.

R. Levi, we should note, does not actually say that apples should be included in the haroset, but it is clear that, for him, apples are a taste-memory, closely connected to haroset and its symbolism. R. Yohanan, on the other hand, like R. Joshua b. Levi in the Jerusalem Talmud, believes that haroset is in memory of the clay used for the bricks that the Jews made as slaves in Egypt. We should note here that R. Yohanan and R. Levi are both rabbis from the Land of Israel, so the Babylonian Talmud here may be reporting a debate that actually took place there but was not preserved in Land of Israel sources.

What is to be done with these differing opinions? The Babylonian Talmud cites Abbaye, a fourth-century Babylonian rabbi, who says that haroset must be *both* acidic and thick. Apples clearly were more sour than sweet in late antique Babylonia, and probably much more sour in antiquity in general than they are today. The first-century Roman writer Pliny writes of apples, including the Italian wild apple, "with a horrible sourness... so powerful it will blunt the edge of a sword."[19] Thus Abbaye makes his haroset acidic in memory of the apples.

The Babylonian Talmud proceeds with a text that supports first R. Yohanan's opinion, and then R. Elazar b. Tzadok's ruling that haroset is a mitzva:

> There is a *baraita* like the statement of R. Yohanan: The spice is in memory of the straw, the haroset is in memory of the clay.
>
> R. Elazar b. Tzadok said: "The merchants in Jerusalem used to say, 'Come take your spices for the mitzva.'"

The *baraita* confirms R. Yohanan's view that haroset is a memory of the clay, rather than of the apples. Further support for R. Yohanan comes from two medieval rabbis, who may have had a text of the Jerusalem Talmud that differed somewhat from the version with which we

19. Pliny, *Natural History* 15.52. There is some uncertainty as to whether the biblical *tapuaḥ* is indeed an apple or some other fruit: D. Zohary, M. Hopf, *Domestication of Plants in the Old World*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 143–4; 171–4.

are familiar. Our texts of the Mishna and the Talmuds do not reveal where the name "haroset" came from. But both the *Roke'aḥ* and the *Mordekhai* [20] write that in the Jerusalem Talmud, in the chapter dealing with the Eve of Passover, it says, "Why was it called by the name of haroset? In memory of the bricks which were made from *ḥarsit*." In another passage from the Jerusalem Talmud, *ḥarsit* is described as pale-colored earth from which pottery was made (Y. Shabbat 11b), a material clearly resembling clay. While the Babylonian Talmud associates haroset with apples then, it rejects the view that this is its major association. The apples may hint at the taste of haroset, but they are not mentioned as an ingredient. The important thing is that haroset should be thick like clay, and acidic, and that spices should be added, in memory of the straw (Ex. 5:6–18).

Straw was a critical element in the Israelites' brick making in Egypt according to the biblical account. When Moses asked Pharaoh to let his people go, his first response was to refuse, and to increase their suffering by cutting off their supply of straw, while still demanding the same number of bricks as before. The Israelites protested bitterly that Moses had simply made their lot worse: "The Lord look upon you and judge, because you have made our savour abhorrent in the eyes of Pharaoh and in the eyes of his servants" (Ex. 5:21).[21] By including spices in the haroset, in memory of the straw, the rabbis of the Talmud have changed the metaphorical abhorrent stink of the Israelite slaves to the sweet smell of the spices.

Spices were also used as part of the worship of God Himself in the incense offered at the Temple altar. So with the inclusion of spices, haroset became part of the celebration of redemption on Passover eve.

The texts here record the discussion of the multiple symbolic meanings of haroset, which serve to remind the participants in the Seder of various aspects of the deliverance of the Jews from slavery. But these symbolisms can be seen to be shifting over the years and miles which separate the sources of the Land of Israel, i.e. the Mishna and

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20. For more about the *Roke'aḥ* (Rabbi Eleazar ben Judah of Worms [1165–1230]) and the *Mordekhai* (Rabbi Mordechai ben Hillel [c. 1240–1298]), see below, chapter 3.
21. Translation adapted as in JPS (1917) version.

the Jerusalem Talmud, from the Babylonian Talmud. Haroset is now a memory of the clay for the bricks of slavery, with the spices a memory of the straw. There is no longer any reference to the blood mentioned in the Jerusalem Talmud, but we now have the symbolism of redemption. Thus haroset is bivalent in its significance, and those who eat it are incorporating the memories of both slavery and redemption.

As I have noted, we do not know whether haroset belongs to the time of the Second Temple or to the later period after the destruction of the Temple. However, if haroset was taken into use after the Destruction, this would certainly reflect the talmudic tendencies to emphasize midrashim of comfort and the promise of redemption for a generation bereft of the Temple.

HAROSET AND THE GRECO-ROMAN WORLD

By the end of Temple times, when we first hear of haroset, the Land of Israel had long been under the influence of Greece and Rome. Is there any evidence of haroset or something like it in Greek or Latin literature?

While rejecting the religious cults of the Greeks and Romans, Jews lived their lives in the Greco-Roman world, and willingly or unwillingly took part in its culture. Their everyday language appears to have been Aramaic, but some of them spoke Greek as well, and many Greek words found their way into the texts of the Mishna and the Talmuds. King Herod built the Second Temple using Greek orders of architecture. And there is clear evidence from the Tosefta's description of a formal meal that at least some Jews in the Land of Israel dined like Greeks or Romans on occasion:

> What is the order of the meal? As the guests enter, they are seated on benches or chairs until everyone assembles.
>
> Once everyone has arrived, they give them [water] for their hands, and each one washes one hand.
>
> They mix [wine] for them in the cup, and everyone makes the blessing for himself. They bring them hors d'oeuvres, and everyone makes the blessing for himself.

> They get up [on couches] and recline, and they bring them [water for washing] their hands, and even though each has already washed one hand, he now washes both hands.
>
> They mix the cup for them, and even though each one has already said the blessing over the first, he says the blessing over the second. They bring them hors d'oeuvres, and although each one has made the blessing over the first, he makes the blessing over the second, but [now] one person makes the blessing for everyone.
>
> Someone who arrives after three [courses] of hors d'oeuvres is not allowed to come in. (Tosefta Berakhot 4:8)

The description above of a formal, festive meal is, at the same time, like and unlike the Passover Seder. More than anything, it recalls the Greco-Roman meal called a *symposium*, with its formal ceremonies, where the participants reclined on couches, and ate, and drank, and talked. So we should not be surprised to find that the Jewish celebration of Passover, the Seder meal itself, has many similarities to Greco-Roman cultural practice.[22] A depiction of such a formal meal on a mosaic floor from Sepphoris in Galilee can be seen in the picture insert (image 1).

Both the Seder and the *symposium* were meals where the participants reclined on couches; where discussion of texts and of the foods eaten formed part of the conversation; where ritual wine pouring and wine drinking played an important part; which often began with appetizers such as lettuce and eggs; and which included dipping food into sauces.[23] A third-century mosaic from Antioch (present-day Antakya, in Turkey) depicts the elements of a meal in order, as we can see from another photograph in the insert (image 2). After a silver *trulla* (ladle)

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22. See on this: S. Stein, "The Influence of Symposia Literature on the Literary Form of the Pesah Haggadah," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 8 (1957): 13–44; contra: B. Bokser, *The Origins of the Seder: The Passover Rite and Early Rabbinic Judaism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984); D. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist: The Banquet in the Early Christian World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002).
23. On the *symposium* see in general: A. Dalby, *Siren Feasts: A History of Food and Gastronomy in Greece* (London/New York: Routledge, 1996; repr. 1997); on the Seder as *symposium*, see n. 22 above.

for hand washing comes the first course of eggs, artichokes and what is probably lettuce, served on a round flat silver plate together with a bowl of dipping sauce, with flat bread at the side. These images would certainly have reminded us of a Seder table, were it not for the accompanying pigs' feet.[24]

The Greco-Roman *symposium* with its servings of delicacies and philosophical discussions of foods was very much part of aristocratic culture. By adopting some of these aristocratic practices and bringing them into the home of every Jew, the rabbis were making even the poorest king for a day – a sensitive way of underlining the message of the redemption from Egypt and its foreshadowing of the redemption which was to come.

Aside from the general similarities between Seder and *symposium*, a number of scholars have suggested that there may be a specific connection between Greco-Roman sauces and haroset. Over fifty years ago, the scholar Siegfried Stein looked for haroset in Athenaeus' *Deipnosophists* (Philosophers at Dinner). This account of a Greek *symposium* from the third century CE was written in Egypt or Rome and was contemporary with the Mishna. Stein writes that dishes "similar though not identical to haroset" are described at length by the same author.[25] He defines haroset as being made of "nuts and fruits pounded together and mixed with spices, wine or vinegar."

Attempts to identify haroset solely on the basis of its modern ingredients, however, are doomed to failure. The ingredients, and hence the taste, have varied over time, and while almost all haroset today is sweet, we shall see this was not so in the past, nor were nuts an essential ingredient. We have already seen the Babylonian Talmud's reference to the acidic, or sour, taste of haroset. Athenaeus also cites an earlier Greek food writer, Archestratus, who gives instructions for dipping food into a sauce made of pounded hyssop and vinegar.[26] We shall see in the next

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24. F. Cimok, ed., *Antioch Mosaics* (Istanbul: A Turizm Yayınları, 1995), 47.
25. Stein (above, n. 22), 16.
26. Archestratus of Gela was a fourth-century BCE food writer cited extensively by Athenaeus in his *Deipnosophists*. His most recent editors, Olson and Sens, describe *embapto* as "the *vox propria* (proper term) for dipping food in a side dish sauce or the like."

chapter that both hyssop and vinegar are present (among other things) in a recipe for haroset given by Maimonides (the Rambam) in the twelfth century.[27] Interestingly, a dry mixture of pounded hyssop, salt and spices is sold today in the modern Middle East as a dipping condiment for bread, or as a spread for dough before it is baked. This is called *dukkeh*.[28] We remember that this was the term used both in the Jerusalem Talmud and by present-day Yemenite Jews for pounded haroset.

If ingredients alone cannot provide the key to the origin of haroset, we must turn to philology and function. Perhaps surprisingly, some evidence for Greco-Roman haroset comes from Egypt in the Middle Ages. The Cairo Genizah, a collection of Jewish manuscripts, has preserved a fragment of a mishnaic glossary that explains Hebrew and Aramaic terms from the Mishna by using Greek words transliterated into Hebrew characters. This has been published by Nicholas de Lange, who dates it to "earlier than the tenth century," making it one of the earliest documents in the Genizah.[29]

In the glossary, the Hebrew words "*shafah haroset,*" "pounds haroset," are translated into Greek and transliterated into Hebrew letters as טריבי אנבמוס, *tribei enbamous*. *Enbamous* appears to refer to the Greek word *embamma*, which means a dipping sauce, deriving from the verb *embapto*, to dip. As noted above, Archestratus also mentions dipping (*embapte*) food; his particular sauce was made of pounded hyssop and vinegar.[30] Clearly, however, not all forms of *embamma* were made with hyssop and/or vinegar. The Roman author Pliny, for example, mentions a form of *embamma* made with mint (*NH* 20.53.147).

I have already mentioned the New Testament account of Jesus at the Last Supper dipping in the dish, identifiable, possibly, as haroset. It can hardly be coincidental that *embapto* is the verb used by Jesus in the

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27. Maimonides, *Commentary on the Mishna*, Pesaḥim 10:3 *ad loc.*
28. *Dukkeh/dukkah*: C. Roden, *A New Book of Middle Eastern Food* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), 89–90.
29. N. de Lange, *Greek Jewish Texts from the Cairo Genizah* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996), 304 no.16, l. 12.
30. Archestratus, *Fragments from the Life of Luxury,* ed. and trans. J. Wilkins and S. Hill (Totnes: Prospect Books, 2011), 58, with Greek text in Athenaeus' *Deipnosophists* vii, 326f., which has *hyssopos*, like the Septuagint text of Exodus 12:22.

two Gospel accounts (Matt. 26:23, mentioned above; Mark 14:20) of the disciple who will dip (*embapsas, embaptomenos*) with him in the dish.

Additional evidence comes from the one Greco-Roman cookery book which has survived from antiquity. This collection, known as *de re coquinarea*, is attributed to the legendary Roman gourmet Apicius. In its present form it dates to fourth-century Rome, but it certainly includes earlier material from the first and second centuries CE. The Latin text often uses Greek words, in the same way that present-day English cookery writers aspiring to *haute cuisine* use French culinary terms. The collection includes two ways of dressing lettuce and endives:[31]

> **Endives and lettuces:**
> *Correct* endive with a dressing of *liquamen*,[32] a little oil and chopped onion. But instead of lettuce in winter serve endive in *enbamma* or with honey and sharp vinegar.
>
> **Lettuces**: with *oxypor[i]um*, with vinegar and a little *liquamen* for the digestion, and to ease wind and *to prevent the lettuces from doing harm*. [Stresses in italics are mine.]
> 2 oz cumin,
> 1 oz ginger,
> 1 oz green rue,
> 12 scruples (=½ oz) juicy dates,
> 1 oz pepper,
> 9 oz honey,
> Ethiopian, Syrian or Libyan cumin.
>
> Pound the cumin after you have steeped it in vinegar. When it has dried, mix all the ingredients with the honey. When required, mix half a teaspoonful with vinegar and a little *liquamen* or take half a teaspoon after dinner.

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31. Translation: C. Grocock, S. Grainger (eds. and trans.), *Apicius: A Critical Edition with an Introduction and an English Translation of the Latin Recipe Text* (Totnes: Prospect Books, 2006), iii, 18, 1–2, slightly adapted.
32. *Liquamen* was the famous Roman salty fish sauce also known as *garum*.

The recipes here specify that these dips "correct" (*medere*) endives. They state that lettuce and endives are interchangeable, and can be served either with *enbamma*, or honey and vinegar.[33]

The digestive sauce called *oxyporium*, noted specifically for *preventing lettuce doing harm*, is reminiscent of the Babylonian Talmud's haroset, which counteracted the harmful *kappa* in the bitter herbs. Talmudic bitter herbs, as I have noted, were also usually lettuce or endives.

Greek and Roman doctors such as Galen and Anthimus usually saw lettuce as beneficial, or at least less harmful than other vegetables. Athenaeus, writing about the Greek *symposium*, suggests that lettuce is an anti-aphrodisiac. It has been claimed that these supposed anti-aphrodisiac properties encouraged the use of lettuce at the Seder; the rabbis wished to discourage the riotous revelry common at Greek *symposia* after the banquet.[34] However, it may be noted that lettuce was often eaten as an appetizer by Greek and Roman banqueters with no apparent concern about its possible effect on their subsequent sexual function.[35]

Although both the Talmud and the *Apicius* collection agree on the potential harmfulness (or at least bitterness) of lettuce and endives, and both discuss the powers of haroset and *enbamma* (and *oxyporium*) to correct this potential harm, we are not told of the ingredients of *enbamma* or haroset. However, we shall see that many of the ingredients mentioned in the *Apicius oxyporium* sauce – dates, as well as ginger, cumin, pepper, vinegar and honey – appear in various forms of haroset. Indeed, dates and date honey (*silan*) are ingredients of the earliest forms of haroset for which we have recipes, from the ninth and tenth centuries, as we shall see in chapter 2.

On the other hand, I have never seen rue – an ingredient of *oxyporium* – in a recipe for haroset, although herbs in general are sometimes mentioned. It may be relevant to note that the intensely bitter rue is a particular favorite with *Apicius*, appearing in about 20 percent of his recipes, which could reflect individual preference rather than common

33. One of the manuscripts of the *Apicius* collection here has the form *enbamma* like the Genizah glossary, rather than the classical Greek *embamma.*
34. Bokser (above, n. 22).
35. Athenaeus, *Deipnosophists* iii, 101b.

practice. There was, however, a trend of incorporating bitter herbs into haroset both in Ashkenaz and Sepharad in the Middle Ages. The vinegar added later to the mix recalls the vinegar or sour wine that was often added to haroset from the time of the *Geonim*, giving it a sweet-and-sour or even entirely sour taste.

We have seen that the Jerusalem Talmud called haroset *dukkeh*, indicating a food that was pounded. The Greek mishnaic glossary we saw above also indicates that haroset was pounded. The *embamma* described by Archestratus above was made of pounded hyssop and vinegar, and Apicius' *oxyporium*, used to counteract the harmful effects of lettuce, includes the instruction to pound some of the ingredients.

The Babylonian Talmud was more distant in place and time from the Greco-Roman world than the Jerusalem Talmud, and belonged to a different culinary culture. However, the Babylonian Talmud does sometimes preserve and cite older original material that has been lost from its Land of Israel counterpart. The Babylonian Talmud's discussion about haroset begins by citing rabbis from the Land of Israel, which implies that haroset originated in the Land of Israel. It is probable, then, that haroset owes its origins to the Greco-Roman dipping sauces whose function was to counteract the bitterness and/or ill effects of lettuce and endives. These sauces were made, at least sometimes, like haroset, by pounding some of the ingredients, and some of these ingredients overlap with known ingredients of haroset, even if they are documented from later dates. The philological evidence of the Genizah glossary confirms that some early medieval Jews identified haroset with the dipping sauce known to the Greco-Roman world by the Greek name of *embamma*.[36]

Bitter herbs appear to have been eaten on Passover from biblical times. However, in the Greco-Roman period, bitter lettuce and endives were identified as harmful, by some authorities at least, and in need of correction in a dipping sauce. Could this have been the reason for the introduction of haroset into the Passover Seder? Perhaps. Once it was

36. *Embamma* is also used as a term for haroset by the eighteenth-century Italian Christian Hebraist Antonio Zanolini in his *Lexicon Chaldaico-Rabbinicum* (Padua: Typis Seminarii, 1747), 263, s.v. *maror.*

there, however, the rabbis seem to have had no choice but to give it symbolic significance as well.

"Under the Apple Tree": Haroset and the Midrash

Rabbi Levi, in the Babylonian Talmud, suggested that haroset was "in memory of the apple." Apples have been an important element of Ashkenazic haroset from the Middle Ages to the present day, so I digress deliberately here to look at what the apple tree symbolized for the rabbis of late antiquity, particularly in the midrashim, the rabbinic explanations and parables on the biblical Song of Songs. The talmudic halakhic (legal) texts discussed haroset and its texture and taste, and these discussions became the basis for later rabbinical instructions of how to make it and use it. In parallel, the midrashic texts with their rabbinical interpretations of biblical texts, and especially their allegorizing tendencies, became the basis for many of the later rabbinical interpretations of what haroset symbolizes.

"The Song of Songs which is Solomon's" (Song. 1:1) is a series of love songs which include some of the most beautiful descriptions of the coming of spring to the Land of Israel. The rabbis debated whether to include these erotic poems into the canon of the Bible, but eventually accepted the view that "all the Writings are holy but the Song of Songs is the Holy of Holies."[37] So the Song of Songs is read aloud in synagogue on Passover, the spring festival.

The Song of Songs talks of many fruits and spices, as well as wine, milk and the finest oil. The fruits appear both growing, in fields, orchards and gardens, and as ready to be eaten. Thus there are vineyards and vines with tender grapes, green figs forming on the fig tree, an orchard of pomegranates in bloom, gardens of luscious fruits and nut trees. The lover rouses his beloved "under the apple tree," where her mother gave birth to her (8:5). Fruits ready to eat include raisin cakes and clusters of grapes, fragrant apples, pomegranates split open or giving their juice, and date honey.

37. Statement of Rabbi Akiva in Mishna Yadayim 3:5.

The lover compares his beloved to a date palm, with its clusters her breasts, and says, "I will go up into the palm tree" (7:8). Spices and perfumes adorn the lover and his beloved: "Nard and saffron, calamus (*kaneh*)[38] and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense; myrrh, and aloes, with all the chief spices (*roshei besamim*)" (4:14). Spices also flavor their wine, and the Song ends with the lover asking his beloved to make haste to the "mountains of spices" (8:14).

Having accepted the Song of Songs into the Bible, the rabbis interpreted this love poetry allegorically: the lover is God and the Jewish people, His beloved. This interpretation is developed in a number of Midrashim, one of which, Song of Songs Rabba, was written in the Land of Israel, probably around the sixth century.

Many of the fruits and spices of the biblical love poem are explained as allegories of God and His love for the Jewish people, and of the Temple in Jerusalem where Jews had loved and worshipped Him. Thus the Midrash explains the very first mention of spices as referring to the incense used in the Temple at Jerusalem.[39] In the wilderness, the priests had taken the "best spices" (*besamim rosh*), including flowing myrrh (*mordror*) and cinnamon, for anointing the Tabernacle and its contents, and other spices for the incense (Ex. 30:23–38). The Babylonian Talmud gives us details of the traditions about the ingredients of the incense used in the Temple – and many of these spices are indeed the same as those mentioned in the Song of Songs: frankincense, nard, saffron, cinnamon and myrrh.[40]

Some of the fruits mentioned in the Song of Songs are also related to Temple worship. The fig tree laden with green figs is seen as being

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38. *Kaneh* has not been identified: since the word in a non-spice context simply means a reed, fragrant reed is the literal meaning. The traditional translation, sweet calamus, is probably incorrect: M. Meyerhof, ed., trans. and com., *Sarh Asma al-Uqqar (l'Explication des Noms de Drogues): Un Glossaire de Matière Médicale Composé par Maïmonide: Mémoires Présentés à l'Institut d'Égypte* 41 (Cairo: Imprimerie de l'Institut Française d'Archéologie Orientale, 1940), 164–5; A. Dalby *Dangerous Tastes: The Story of Spices* (London: British Museum Press, 2000; repr. 2002), 171 n. 3.
39. Song of Songs Rabba 1:2:1.
40. Keritot 6a. The memory of the scent of the incense in the Temple is preserved by the inclusion of this description into the synagogue liturgy on Sabbath morning.

like the baskets of first fruits taken to the Temple, while the vines with tender grapes recall the Temple drink-offerings.[41] A mosaic from the synagogue in Sepphoris in Galilee depicting these first fruits can be seen in the picture insert (image 3).

Apart from memories of the Temple, the rabbis were also, indeed even more, concerned with God's eternal love for His people Israel, and with past and future redemption. So each of the fruits and blossoms of the Song of Songs in turn is interpreted by the Midrash as showing the love of God, the virtues of His beloved people and redemption past and in the future. The love of God for His people as His children is expressed through the gift of fruits and spices. Here is one example:

> *My beloved is gone down into his garden* (6:2) – God is like a king who had a garden where he planted rows of nut trees and apple trees and pomegranates. He handed them over to his son saying, "I do not require anything of you, only when these trees yield their first fruit bring it to me and let me taste, so I may see the work of my hand and rejoice in you."

The fruits are also allegorized as individual gifts given by God to His people, the most important of which was the Torah. The apple tree is compared to Mount Sinai where the Torah was given:

> *I roused thee under the apple tree* (8:5) – This refers to Sinai. Why is it compared to an apple tree? Because just as an apple tree gives fruit in the month of Sivan, so the Torah was given in Sivan.[42]

The commentaries on the Torah, the Mishna and Talmud are seen as the choice products of the fruits: the Talmud is "flavored" with the Mishna, like wine flavored with spices.[43] The fruits are also used as allegories for the People of Israel and their righteousness in praising God and studying His law:

41. Song of Songs Rabba 2:13:3.
42. Apples: Song of Songs Rabba 8:5:1.
43. Wine: Song of Songs Rabba 6:2:3; 8:2:1.

> *I went down into the garden of nuts* (6:11) – this is the world. *To see the fruits of the valley* – these are Israel. *To see whether the vine had blossomed* – these are the synagogues and the houses of study. *Whether the pomegranates were in flower* – these are the children who are busy learning Torah and sit in rows like pomegranate seeds.

However the rabbis were nothing if not realistic, and there is a clear sense that the Jewish people includes both learned and ignorant, virtuous and less virtuous. Thus there are alternative explanations of *I went down into the garden of nuts*. For example:

> *I went down into the garden of nuts* – just as the shell of a nut protects its fruit, so the ignorant of Israel strengthen those who study Torah.

or:

> *I went down into the garden of nuts* – just as there are soft nuts, medium nuts and hard nuts, so in Israel there are those who give charity unsolicited, those who have to be asked before they give and those who do not give at all.[44]

Thus in the Midrash on the Song of Songs, the Jewish people is associated allegorically with a number of fruits, with the pomegranates, grapes, figs and dates which are part of the Seven Fruits of the Land of Israel (Deut. 8:8),[45] but also with apples and nuts.

The Midrash also alludes to redemption, memories of the past and hopes for the future. "For, lo, the winter is past" (2:11) was seen as an allusion to the four hundred years of slavery in Egypt, ended by God's mercy with the redemption at Passover. Hopes for the future redemption are expressed through the pomegranates: "*Thy shoots are an orchard of pomegranates* (4:13) – God will make Israel like an orchard of pomegranates in the messianic era."[46]

44. Nuts: Song of Songs Rabba 6:11:1.
45. "A land of wheat, and barley, and vines, and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive oil and [date] honey."
46. Redemption from Egypt: Song of Songs Rabba 2:11:1. Future redemption: 4:12:6.