Meals in Early Judaism

Social Formation at the Table

Edited by
Susan Marks and Hal Taussig

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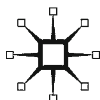

MEALS IN EARLY JUDAISM
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Preface

The primary context and scholarly engine of this book has been the several incarnations of the units of the Society of Biblical Studies since the early 2000s. The Society of Biblical Literature (SBL) Consultation, Seminar, and Section on Meals in the Greco-Roman World each worked on meals in early Judaism as an integral part of its work, with the Seminar culminating in "ten theses" about meals in early Judaism that form the heart of this book. This book is thoroughly indebted to the many scholars in each of the stages of this more-than-a-decade-long collegium. More importantly, this book represents a move from the incubation of the study of early Jewish meals within a set of smaller frames (including the SBL study units) to a more public sphere, where various population segments can interact with the new frames of reference this book proposes.

This book marks a breakthrough in the study of the meals of early Judaism. While giving priority to the specifically Jewish character, form, and significance of these meals of the first five centuries CE, it integrates the overall study into a larger set of disciplines. It situates the meals of early Judaism within the study of social life of the late Greek and early Roman periods of the Mediterranean. In this way, the book takes advantage of major advances in the study of meals from the perspectives of classics, gender studies, anthropology, ritual studies, and early Christian studies.

These perspectives make it possible for the book to take on with particular energy what we have dubbed the social formation occurring in the meals of early Judaism. By this we mean, these meals were a primary medium for ways Jews related to the societies around them, related to one another, and came to understand themselves socially. This social formational lens brings together some of the newer studied dimensions of first-

through-fourth-century Jewish identities with the specificities of history in that period and the dynamics of meals themselves. As these perspectives work together, the study of early Jewish meals breaks free of the subsidiary functions it has served in the recent past relative to the enactments of modern Jewish meals, the adjudication of kashrut in our times, or the character of Rabbinic Judaisms and Christian agendas. What comes more clearly into focus is the particular, complicated, creative, and transitional facets of early Jewish meals in relationship to ongoing social relations.

Even with these breakthroughs, this book cannot be what many of us need it to be: namely a thoroughgoing portrait of the varieties and consistencies of the meals of Judaism, from the late second Temple through the major steps of Rabbinic Judaism's formation. The resources for such a major portrait are simply not yet at hand. There are larger historical and literary puzzles to solve before such a volume can be accomplished, among them a full accounting of kinds of Judaism in this period, clearer pictures of the the relationship of early Judaism to Roman imperium, and the writing and redaction of early Rabbinic literature. So this book is neither a comprehensive picture nor a narration of "the story" of the many ways these meals fashioned diverse social strategies for Jews in that pivotal time.

Rather this book stands as key prolegomena to such a full portrait of early Jewish meals. Without the key and complex analysis of the intersection of Jewish, Christian, and Greco-Roman meals accomplished here, the eventual big picture cannot be accomplished. Only with the crucial social formational perspective can such a treatment of the varieties and consistencies of the meals of early Judaism come into full view. Without tangling with the quirky and energizing Jewish diversities in the Hellenistic and Roman world on a theoretical level, as is done in this book, clear pictures of early Jewish life, especially as elaborated in its meals, will not come into view. So the breakthrough of this book has more to do with its discovery of formal and performative paradigms within this specific historical period and methodologically centered analyses of a couple of moments in the meals of early Judaism.

Because of the enormous spectrum of meaning that meals have in the Rabbinic Judaism born in the period this book treats, we have committed to connecting the meals of early Judaism and the later interpretations of larger Rabbinic Judaism without reductively making them identical. It is true that there is rarely a page within this book that is not informed by and informs today's larger Rabbinic paradigms. Yet, simultaneously holding onto specific social formations of early Judaism prior to its Rabbinic flourishing have ended up demonstrating unique, unpredictable, and highly creative meal dynamics. Our extended study of perhaps the longest text on Jewish meals within this early period, that of Philo's Therapeutae, exhibits exactly such meal dynamics. This concentration on the meals of the Therapeutae, however, is not meant to characterize all meals of early Judaism as much as to take advantage of such a major text to provide models for eventual study of other early Jewish communities: such as Qumran, the shadowy worlds of diasporic Judaism in places such as Asia Minor or Rome, and early Christ communities such as those of Matthew or James.

We are aware of one particular and substantive methodological lacuna in this book. There is no chapter on the archeological dimensions of the meals of early Judaism. More recent sessions of the Meals in the Greco-Roman World Group have addressed these subjects. Meanwhile, many of the essays in this book do rely heavily on explorations of archeology and material culture for their approaches to this historical period, and many of the classical studies, gender studies, and early Christian studies optics informing this book in primary ways do so as well.

We eagerly await the next steps of providing a more general portrait of early Judaism's meals, and hope that the formal and performative framework emerging from this volume open the door to such a needed general portrait, integrating the many literary, archeological, religious, and sociopolitical elements of the wide spectrum of early Judaism's meals.

Hal Taussig

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Acknowledgments

Editing a volume about the collaborative nature of meals, and the ways they contribute to all manners of shared practices and ideas, allowed us to become more aware of those persons in our own lives that we collaborate with, edit with, write with, dine with, and live with.

Collaborating as coeditors allowed this volume to grow in insight and depth, in ways that we could not have achieved alone or imagined ahead of time. Similarly, we so appreciate the willingness of our authors to help us reenvision the essential questions of this volume as well as consider our questions.

This work derives directly both in its conceptualization as a book and in its content from the Society of Biblical Literature's Seminar on Meals in the Greco-Roman World. All of the chapters are related directly to papers written during the six-year tenure of that body, 2005–2011. As editors, it has been our privilege to pass on, refine, support, place in perspective, and complement that body of work. We are especially indebted to that Seminar's Steering Committee: Ellen Aitken (of blessed memory), Jonathan Brumberg-Kraus, Matthias Klinghardt, Susan Marks, Dennis Smith (cochair), and Hal Taussig (cochair).

From the beginning, the Seminar cochairs urged those in the Seminar occasionally to dine together at the Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature. The kinds of collaborations forged at those meals appear in this volume in all the ideas that continue to fascinate us and in the productive relationships between authors and between authors and editors.

This is the second volume on the work of the Seminar published by Palgrave Macmillan, and we are grateful for the keen insight, strong support, and professional standards of Palgrave's Religion Editor Burke Gerstenschlager and his staff.

Other early readers helped strengthen this volume. Anonymous readers at Palgrave Macmillan asked salient questions. Heather White, visiting assistant professor of American Religions at New College of Florida, offered valuable insights concerning the couple of pieces that she read in draft form.

As editors, we hail our respective primary mentors, Ross Kraemer, Robert Kraft, and Burton Mack, for the many ways they pointed us toward the study of the meals of early Judaism.

Finally, we thank our most regular dinner companions: our friends and family who supported us in the creation of this volume, as in all else. We would particularly like to mention the wonderful love and support of Susan's husband, Bruce, and daughter, Madeline, and Hal's partner, Susan Cole.

Abbreviations

AA	*American Anthropologist*
CBR	*Currents in Biblical Research*
JAAR	*Journal of the American Academy of Religion*
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JHS	*Journal of Hellenic Studies*
JPS	*Jewish Publication Society*
JQR	*The Jewish Quarterly Review*
JSIJ	*Jewish Studies, an Internet Journal*
JSJ	*Journal for the Study of Judaism*
JTS	*Journal of Theological Studies*
LCL	*Loeb Classical Library*
SEG	*Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum*

Introduction

Susan Marks

A book about meals is a book about magic—the magical transformation of people into the identities constructed by the foods they ingest, the group they dine with, and the ideas they share at their gatherings. In other words, this volume explores the intricate processes of social formation and transformation at work in early Jewish meal settings. It is a question that illuminates the very nature of Jewish intergroup and interpersonal interaction, but no other project has addressed this task. Individual studies of Jewish meals have broken ground by examining the Passover Seder. Nevertheless, this is the first project to tackle larger questions concerning Jewish meals.

We stand at a confluence of questions and methods that make such an endeavor possible. Owing to the studies of anthropology, history, religion, and sociology, including attention to ritual and food studies, the meal comes into focus as a place of interest in ways it never has before. For instance, while Passover has generated studies for centuries, only recent methodologies allow for distinctions between different kinds of questions, each with their own methodology and purpose. While others pursue questions concerning the Haggadah as a book,[1] this volume collects approaches that reveal glimpses of meal practice.

We also have more of an idea of why meals should interest us. Not only does the work of diverse scholarly disciplines make new explorations into meals possible, but also these various approaches reveal forces for continuity wrestling with change, with some aspects of meals shared across cultures, while others appear distinct from one subculture to another. We observe this for the meals around us in the twenty-first century: the formal

family holiday meals; the scarfing down of microwaved food before running out the door; dinner out at an ethnic restaurant; a potluck to celebrate the birthday of a friend; a seder held at the White House. The tensions and possibilities created by the juxtaposition of meal traditions would also have been true in antiquity. The ancient world would not have known the technologies, such as refrigeration, that create the possibility of certain forms of dining, but people in Hellenized and Romanized worlds of early Judaism would have appreciated the overlapping of cultures that shape some of our meal choices.

Not only did meal practices in the ancient world emerge from this intersection of cultures, but they also formed the centerpoint of activities that have often been treated as freestanding. For instance, approaches to Rabbinic Judaism have often focused on a law, a famous sage, or a prayer. Nevertheless, if we consider the example of the Passover seder we can recognize the evocation of laws, sages, and prayers that only emerge in the context of that particular meal. Further, the volume before us recalls that the Passover meal developed in relationship to other extensive meal traditions involving the practices of daily eating as well as special occasions. It is wonderful that these earlier, fine studies of Passover exist, but it is not sufficient. The meal was a major social context in the early Judaism, which until recently has been seriously understudied.

Finally the present moment holds promise for study of early Jewish meals because of comparative work done on ancient Greek, Roman, and early Christian meal practices. As never before there is shared scholarship examining ancient meals and an opportunity for those studying Judaism to participate. While full of promise, the comparative study of meals has presented a particular challenge for the study of Judaism. It cannot be denied that a different theological agenda informs at least some of the scholarly work on Christian meals: What meals did Jesus know and how does that help followers interpret his teachings? The fear for scholars of Judaism has sometimes been that Jewish meals would inevitably vanish into the backstory of early Jesus followers and emerging Christianity. Those participating in the present volume, and in the larger project of the Meals in the Greco-Roman World Group of the Society

of Biblical Literature, insist that participants at meals belong to an interactive cultural story of traditions emerging in dialogue with one another, despite and because of neighboring practices. Such work insists that studies of Christian meals must look at Jewish meals, but likewise, studies of Jewish meals must look at Christian texts and studies as well. Unlike earlier studies that relegate Judaism to background, the authors and editors of this present work trust that the extensive explorations of Jewish meals glimpsed here establish ongoing questions concerning shared and distinct practices. As partners in comparative work, when exploring neighboring traditions, we best serve ourselves and each other by revealing intricacies, independence, and interdependence of the traditions we explore.

Standing at this confluence of new methods and new recognitions, we find early Jewish meals familiar and yet new. They resemble the meals of their neighbors even as these similarities may mask other differences. Each study in this volume shows the pervasiveness of shared features and how each tradition stands alone. The essays in this volume take a variety of perspectives. They focus on food, on speech at tables, and on dance, as well as on other practices generated and shared by those gathered for the meal. Each exploration helps fill out our understanding of the practices surrounding meals and each provides a new lens for the study of early Judaism. Taken together, they form the argument that meals provide a crucial site for understanding the development of early Jewish society. These studies reveal important continuities while allowing glimpses of negotiation and change. Together they argue for the early Jewish meal as a locus of social formation.

Before turning to the essays let us consider in more detail the scholarly developments that make such insights possible. I have already mentioned Passover as the Jewish meal qua meal that comes instantly to mind. The studies in this volume go beyond the study of Passover, yet they inexorably build about the pathbreaking work of those who made the Passover meal their focus. Likewise, the essays themselves, partaking of new methodologies and conceptualities, deserve a quick preview here. First, however, all depend upon understandings of Hellenistic and Roman meals developed in recent years.

The Roman Banquet

The expansion of the Hellenistic world in the wake of Alexander spread Greek dining practices far and wide. The Roman Empire then absorbed, transmitted, and transformed the meal customs of its predecessors. While a myriad of different Roman banquets resembled the literary prototype of a symposium described by Plato, they also reflected the living exploration of wealth, wisdom, class, religion, and ethnicity, enacted by interrelated groups and stimulated by the newer realities of expansion and subject peoples. The scholars whose work appears in this volume are heirs to important studies considering the complexities of meals of the fifth century BCE to the fifth century CE and beyond.

Two works appeared almost simultaneously, on different continents, laying out key features of the symposiastic traditions while emphasizing that the meal was a social institution. Dennis Smith and Matthias Klinghardt each wrote of the histories and typologies of meals, urging the importance of understanding these structures.[2] Smith explains that if we recognize the relationship between various meals (symposia, funerary banquet, sacrificial meals, meals of Associations, mystery meals, everyday meals, and so forth) we can begin to work out a "common banquet tradition."[3] These diverse meals appear "astonishingly similar in structure," observes Hal Taussig, who summarizes their typologies.[4] Taussig explains that "they include the following:

- the reclining of (more or less) all participants while eating and drinking together for several hours in the evening
- the order of a supper (*deipnon*) of eating, followed by an extended time (*symposion*) of drinking, conversation, and performance
- marking the transition from *deipnon* to *symposion* with a ceremonial libation, almost always wine
- leadership by a "president" (*symposiarch*) of the meal—a person not always the same, and sometimes a role that was contingent or disputed
- a variety of marginal personages, often including servants, uninvited guests, 'entertainers', and dogs."[5]

This structure provides those who follow with a way to talk about the similarities, differences, functions, and questions that emerge in close examination of early meals, including early Jewish meals.

In addition, recently, Smith explored the differences between Greek and Roman meals, opening up the variety of meal types available within the Jewish or Christian context still further.[6] Conceptualizing the meal in this way reveals how early Jewish Studies and early Christian Studies, including the present study, learn from and contribute to a conversation first engaged in by classicists. To this end, some will rightly see the present volume as a companion to the recent *Meals in the Early Christian World,* which also embraced this challenge.[7] This developing awareness observes the improvisation made by individual banquets and groups, while not losing sight of the context within which these parties enacted such changes.

Previous Scholarship on Passover

The insights into a "common banquet tradition" can then also shape the way we understand the distinct practices at the Passover meal. Jewish meals belong to the same typologies as other Hellenistic and Roman meals, argued Smith, as he discussed scholarship related to Passover. This claim engaged an existing debate within Jewish studies. In 1957, Siegfried Stein argued that the Passover Seder was a symposium.[8] He explained how the questions and discussion later made famous in the Haggadah fit the expectations of an event such as the one described by Plato. Stein's essay on classical literature informing Jewish practice was reprinted 20 years later as the ripples of the "pebble" that he had dropped continued to make themselves felt.[9] By contrast, and in response, Baruch Bokser considered references to Passover practices from biblical times forward, bringing this long view to his exploration of the Passover Seder. While accepting some of Stein's assertions he claimed that the impetus for the Seder did not come from "symposia and drinking parties" but rather from a "need for continuity" after the destruction of the Temple.[10] Bokser, like Stein, leaves a great deal for his successors to wrestle with, not least because his

tragic and early death removed him from the conversation.[11] While his conclusions stand at odds with Stein, his clear laying out of the texts, history, and practices of Passover pave the way for continued exploration.

Stein had engaged a remarkable array of Greek and Roman sources, illustrating the places where these provide parallels to occurrences at the Seder, but he did not offer a coherent look at Passover traditions. Bokser took an important methodological step forward in his respect for the textual history of the ritual actions surrounding Passover. He also, where Stein had not, asked how this ritual functioned. He wrote as the study of ritual was just beginning to emerge as an independent subfield. He focused on practice by way of texts, but with an emphasis on practice nonetheless. If he put more emphasis on the Jewish emotional response to trauma rather than shared cultural elements, it waited until more recent decades for scholars of rabbinic literature to revise this trend and to engage the rabbis as Romans.[12] These new approaches call into question some of Bokser's assumptions without negating the importance of his focus on texts and how ritual functions.

The legacy of both Stein and Bokser means that recent scholars must necessarily approach the Passover Seder in light of understanding Roman banquets as well as understanding rabbinic textual trajectories. For instance, when studying the relationship of Tosefta and Mishnah chapters about Passover, Judith Hauptman asks whether the Mishnah's telling of the story of the Exodus at the Passover meal preceded or followed the Tosefta's alternate record, which instead calls for the discussion of legal questions *following* the meal. In this exploration Hauptman used her understanding of symposiastic custom to inform her exploration.[13] Keeping an understanding of symposia in mind, she argues that the Tosefta's version establishing a "study session" following the meal makes more sense in this banquet setting.[14] Thus, Hauptman argues, the Tosefta came first, describing the earlier, more typical, symposium-like meal that the Mishnah later adapts, making it more about telling the story of the Exodus from Egypt *during* the meal rather than waiting until afterward. Later Jewish Seder practice expands upon the Mishnah's order. While Hauptman did not set out

to synthesize the two sides of the earlier debate concerning Passover, in developing her own vision she depends upon on the foundations laid down by Stein *and* Bokser, as well as those who came after.[15]

Studying the Meals of Early Judaism

The studies in this volume take seriously the foundational studies of Roman banquets and Passover, expanding their scope to include other Jewish meals, and other aspects of Jewish dining. These authors emphasize the evidence for social formation at meals. Together they demonstrate the importance of meals for understanding the development of early Judaism. A collaborative piece comes first, pointing the way to the larger field of study. Offering "Ten Theses" concerning Jewish meals, Jonathan Brumberg-Kraus, Jordan Rosenblum, and I (Susan Marks) consider ideas put forward by each other and by other isolated studies in order to suggest a larger vision of Jewish meals. We identify exciting scholarship just beginning to emerge, articulate the nature of the field, as well as suggest questions and directions for profitable study. Our working together on a combined vision (complete with disagreements) allows this piece to become more than the sum of its parts. Together we pull from each other insights into the relationship of meal practices to the study of Jewish life. While these "Ten Theses" make no attempt to begin at the beginning, their vision of the state of field might serve as companion introduction, emphasizing the scope of meal studies and a vision of the future.

Following the Ten Theses, this volume addresses this newly burgeoning area of study by focusing deeply on two moments of early Judaism, then looking at these "case studies" from many angles. Two areas of focus allow for a close consideration of various aspects of meals and their contributions to our understanding of the social formation. The first set of papers explores rabbinic Judaism of the first to the sixth centuries CE. Despite extensive scholarship on this period, the focus on meals offers a new vision of many aspects of rabbinic Judaism that can best be seen, or at least seen with new eyes, from the perspective of the dining hall. Succeeding this more studied

area of Jewish meals, the second set of essays considers a road far less traveled: the insight into Jewish meals provided by Philo as he describes the Therapeutae. Stepping beyond the current debates on whether this community existed in fact or in the utopian imagination of Philo of Alexandria, these essays consider the wealth of description concerning the (real or imagined) meals he presents. These examinations move into new territory by connecting Philo's presentation of these meals and the Jewish world he inhabited.

The first section on rabbinic meals begins with Judith Hauptman (chapter 2) who responds to the Ten Theses, giving a sense of how they might be used. She continues to expand her sense of meals from her reflection on the Ten Theses and on the earlier work of Smith and Taussig. She asks what the rabbinic "framers of Jewish meals were trying to accomplish" in the way they dined. She concentrates particularly on what rabbinic meals reveal about women's participation, from seder to weddings to Torah study. She sees meals as a venue for uncovering hidden aspects of rabbinic Judaism. Following this, Jordan Rosenblum (chapter 3) examines what the rabbis ate at this venue, considering how foodstuffs and related practices shape rabbinic identity. He builds upon centuries of attention to the importance of rules of kashrut, but with a twist. Jordan invokes modern anthropological and sociological studies to move from what rabbinic Jews ate and how they prepared it to what they reveal about themselves with these choices. With meticulous care he considers rabbinic texts that show how meal participants draw distinctions.

The rabbinic Grace after meals, *birkat hamazon,* likewise examines what the rabbis enacted with their practices. My chapter (4) argues that we must attend to the ritual enactment of *birkat hamazon*, rather than only its words, in order to understand the significance of this blessing. The performance of this blessing, or set of related blessings, creates a Jewish variant or alternative to Roman libation practices, while also establishing the important relationship of a diner to dining space. Concluding this set of studies, Jonathan Brumberg-Kraus (chapter 5) applies his sense of the evocative power of the meal in order

to expand this look at meaning making and the words spoken around the table. Brumberg-Kraus considers speech about history, myth, and metaphor, as well as blessings. He explores how words function, delineating ways that meals lend themselves to connecting with and fueling the interpretation of Torah. He examines the kind of awareness and thinking that establish the meal as an important locus in the development of rabbinic literary creativity.

The second series of essays investigates the significance of Philo's description of the meals of the Therapeutae. Our authors consider Philo's *On the Contemplative Life* and its underresearched implications for Jewish meals, observing that one way or another this meal mattered to Philo. For the sake of consistency, all authors have used the same translation of Philo's text, which captures some of the energy of the moment.[16] Philo presents a people through their festive meal, through ritual, food, story, dance, and table discussion. As the authors in this volume pursue the particulars of Philo's presentations, they also consider the larger implications for Jewish meals. A century and half before the Mishnah, here is an involved discussion of a Jewish table. Thus, when we consider Philo's presentation, we exponentially expand our understanding of the range of possible Jewish dining practices.

Hal Taussig (chapter 6) provides background for those less familiar with Philo's text before launching into an exploration of ritual perfection. He reminds us what is at stake, arguing that "it has been classics departments and early Christian scholarship that have studied to some extent the Therapeutae meals without much reference at all to the fact that this is clearly portrayed as a specific practice of Judaism." His essay explores how ritual theory affords insights into this less familiar Jewish ritual practice. Andrew McGowan (chapter 7) next offers a careful consideration of the foodstuffs that appeared on the Therapeutae table, suggesting "their simplicity is a sign of robust and coherent ascetic sensibility, rather than of indifference to the material." As we come to see what was eaten at this meal, we recognize the great variety of possible ways to interpret Jewish dietary legislation.

The celebratory meal that Philo discusses offers glimpses of dancing and types of discussion rarely seen in other accounts of Jewish meals. Mattias Klinghardt (chapter 8) also explores the way the meal shapes its participants. Focusing on one element of the meal, the dance of the philosophers, he argues that Philo establishes their active spiritual nourishment as the main course at the meal. Jonathan Brumberg-Kraus (chapter 9) returns the focus explicitly to the literary quality of the banquet. Table talk, he shows, has an unabashed association with the long history of Greek banqueting. In alluding to earlier discourses, Philo thereby distinguishes the banquet he describes. The feast of the Therapeutae intentionally limits acceptable talk and behavior, recalling us to differences as well as similarities in early Jewish meals.[17]

Wrapping up these explorations, Dennis Smith (chapter 10) considers how these studies contribute to a change in default understandings of Jewish meals, since the volume demonstrates that "meals functioned not only as indicators of social formation in process but also as essential components." He reiterates that following this volume, one cannot go back to models that set Judaism apart. He envisions next steps, building on these new understandings of Jewish meal strategies and their contributions to new Jewish identities.

In different ways, each of the studies of this volume presents the meal as a microcosm of the world at a given moment. As the meal combines regular practices with special celebration, as it constitutes a place of familiar relations as well as a place of meeting, as its diners navigate a whole range of modes, from highly formal to improvised informality, we can begin to see such a meal as holding important clues to the development of early Judaism. In the position of the host, the guest, the latecomer, and the one who leaves the meal, we see whole worlds open up. The social formation visible at meals deserves to capture our attention. This collection offers some important examples, while pointing to areas in need of investigation. But, first, the essay on the "Ten Theses" maps the importance of the work done so far, pointing beyond to questions and possibilities pertinent to the study of early Judaism.

Notes

1. David Stern, "Foreword," in *JPS Commentary on the Haggadah: Historical Introduction, Translation, and Commentary*, ed. Joseph Tabory, xi–xiii (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society, 2008). The present volume takes the opposite fork.
2. Dennis E. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist: The Banquet in the Early Christian World,* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003); Matthias Klinghardt, *Gemeinschaftsmahl und Mahlgemeinschaft: Soziologie und Liturgie frühchristlicher Mahlfeiern*. Texte und Arbeiten zum neutestamentlichen Zeitalter 13 (Tübingen: Francke Verlag, 1996).
3. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 3.
4. Hal Taussig, *In the Beginning Was the Meal: Social Experimentation and Early Christian Identity,* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2009), 6.
5. Taussig, *In the Beginning Was the Meal*, 26; referencing Klinghardt, *Gemeinschaftsmahl und Mahlgemeinschaf*, 45–152; and Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 13–46.
6. See Kathleen E. Corley, *Private Women, Public Meals: Social Conflict in the Synoptic Tradition*. (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1993); Katherine M. D. Dunbabin, *The Roman Banquet: Images of Conviviality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Matthew B. Roller, *Dining Posture in Ancient Rome: Bodies, Values, and Status* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006); and Smith, "Feasting, Hellenistic and Roman Period." In *Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology and the Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).
7. Dennis E. Smith and Hal Taussig, eds., *Meals in the Early Christian World: Social Formation, Experimentation, and Conflict at the Table* (New York: Palgrave Macmillian, 2012).
8. Siegfried Stein, "The Influence of Symposia," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 8 (1957): 13–44; repr. in *Essays in Greco-Roman and Related Talmudic Literature* (New York: Ktav, 1977).
9. Henry A. Fischel, ed., *Essays in Greco-Roman and Related Talmudic Literature* (New York: Ktav, 1977).
10. Baruch M. Bokser, *The Origins of the Seder*: *The Passover Rite and Early Rabbinic Judaism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 50 and 53.
11. See Chapter 5 for Brumberg-Kraus's further exploration of Bokser's contributions.
12. Hayim Lapin, *Rabbis as Romans: The Rabbinic Movement in Palestine, 100–400 CE* (New York: Oxford, 2012); or Seth

Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society 200 B.C.E. to 640 C.E.* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

13. Judith Hauptman, "How Old Is the Haggadah?" *Judaism* 51, no.1 (2002): 5–18; See also Chapter 2 in the present volume.
14. Hauptman, "How Old Is the Haggadah?," 6.
15. See chapter 1 for further discussion of the history and implication of scholarship concerning meals. See chapter 2 for Hauptman's exploration of other aspects of the Passover Seder. For additional scholarship concerning Passover, see Joshua Kulp, "The Origins of the Seder and Haggadah," *CBR* 4, no.1 (2005): 109–134.
16. Joan Taylor, *Jewish Women Philosophers of First-Century Alexandria: Philo's 'Therapeutae' Reconsidered* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006). See discussion of the text and translation of *On the Contemplative Life* in Chapter 6.
17. Again we see an interesting overlap as both Brumberg-Kraus (chapter 9) and Hauptman (chapter 2) observe articulation of acceptable behavior. See Jason König, *Saints and Symposiasts: The Literature of Food and the Symposium in Greco-Roman and Early Christian Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012) for his exploration of this trend in certain later Roman banquets, including, but not exclusively, Jewish and Christian banquets.

CHAPTER 1

Ten Theses Concerning Meals and Early Judaism

Jonathan Brumberg-Kraus, Susan Marks, and Jordan D. Rosenblum

The three of us began to study meals because we understood we could not address our questions concerning Early Judaism without such a perspective.[1] We have now been writing on meals for quite some time and have experienced some very substantial breakthroughs in our accumulated work. The study of Jewish meals as a subdiscipline of Biblical Studies, Jewish Studies, or the emergent field of Food Studies existed, but scholarly attention to ancient Jewish meals tended to be incidental to "silo-ed" disciplinary focuses, with scholars interested in the origins of the Eucharist, the Last Supper, or the Passover Seder in a much less interdisciplinary age.[2] The question of whether these iconic meals were more "Jewish" or "Greek" or an innovation of Jesus often dominated the discussion. Our work sought to take this foundational scholarship forward by employing more theory and engaging in a more interdisciplinary conversation.

We first worked together to articulate these new directions when we were asked to write several theses for presentation at the Society of Biblical Literature's "Meals in the Greco-Roman World" Seminar in 2010. This exercise proved quite fruitful, causing us to realize that together we could explore ideas more deeply and recognize new connections. The crafting of this

chapter provided an opportunity to return to these Ten Theses, to look back at the research that had allowed us to begin our studies, at what we had discovered, and at new possibilities. We consider our Ten Theses as akin to rabbinic hermeneutical principles: rules for reading ancient Jewish sources concerning food and foodways. You will find all Ten Theses listed in the Appendix to this chapter as well as individually featured as epigraphs prior to the discussions they triggered. Further explorations encompass the perspectives of three different scholars who have been involved with this dialogue—one earliest (JBK), the other a little more recently (SM), and another more recently still (JR). On the macrolevel, we tend to agree with each other. However, happily our slight disagreements have led to more nuanced statements.

In this chapter we are interested in explaining early Judaism, from the time when the Second Temple still stood in the early centuries BCE, but most particularly early rabbinic Judaism, whose key texts first appeared in the third century CE. Recently, scholars have argued more forcefully for the Roman-ness of the early Rabbis.[3] In examining the meals of these people, we build upon these developments in rabbinic scholarship while also expanding it in new directions.[4] We aim to share ideas that have proved valuable to us, while simultaneously recognizing what has yet to be explored in the way of Meals in Early Judaism, so that a volume such as this in 20 years will look quite different. In what follows, we explore new insights into the Jewish meal context (Theses 1–4); ways that the study of meals offers confirmation for other kinds of research (Theses 5–6); and finally, the early Jewish development of received meal traditions (Theses 7–10).[5] Ultimately, we demonstrate that a focus on meals transforms prior insights into early Judaism.

1) *Theories developed in other disciplines, including sociology, anthropology, and especially food studies contribute a methodological foundation to the study of the early Jewish table.*

While scholars of Jewish food and meals have drawn profitably on theories from other disciplines for some time (e.g., the influential work of Mary Douglas),[6] the opportunities for dialogue

have greatly expanded in the past two decades. Various scholars, including anthropologists, sociologists, and historians, have turned their attention toward food and meals. These topics have also grown in popular appeal, with the rise of television shows, books, and magazines devoted to cooking and cookery. From scholars working on the ancient Mediterranean in general,[7] to those working on early Christianity in particular,[8] there is much new conversation to be had. Further, work on groups (both Jewish and Gentile) in other time periods and locations have much to offer, overlapping considerations emerging from notions of embodiment, commensality, and foodways.

Scholars of early Judaism have also begun to interact with and profit from the work of food studies in general. Reading cultural and historical studies of food that examine groups temporally, spatially, religiously, and culturally distinct from early Judaism has resulted in more complex, comparative, and theoretically savvy scholarship, such as Brumberg-Kraus's explorations of recent trends in Jewish Food History.[9] For another example, the interactions between politics and gender in World War II America, as explored by Amy Bentley, can inform similar discussions about the rabbis in Roman-period Palestine.[10] Bentley shows how US government propaganda about wartime food rationing evidences broader conceptions of gender construction. Scholars of rabbinic literature can use Bentley's analysis to explore the ways in which rabbinic foodways help to establish and reify rabbinic conceptions of gender.[11] This interaction is not limited to scholars of antiquity, as discussions of politics, food regulations, and corporate business in regard to modern kosher laws draw on similar discussions about the American food system in general.[12] Or the work of scholars such as Ohnuki-Tierney and Appadurai on food and the construction of Japanese and Indian national identities offer suggestive ways of describing the connections (e.g., "metonymic foods") as well as the instructive caveats about simple definitions of national or ethnic "identities" foods and meal practices are supposed to express.[13]

2) *Any early Jewish ritual involving meals must seriously investigate meals, as Catherine Bell observes about ritual:*

> *"When abstracted from its immediate context, an activity is not quite the same activity."*[14]

Because meals are so mundane, scholarship has tended to selectively decontextualize or overly theologize them. The difference between ancient meals found in difficult and fragmentary sources and idealized descriptions of them have too often been blurred. In the light of information supplied by all the fields that contribute to our understanding of meals, we recognize that consideration of meals can no longer be considered a luxury, a nice domestic touch. Rather, without understanding meals, we fail to understand the myriad aspects of the social world that developed as part of the meal. Difficulties abound. On the one hand, the idea that we must investigate the situation of ritual activity sounds obvious; on the other hand, in practice, the study of the ancient world depends on textual passages and fragments, which can easily lead scholars to an articulation of textual puzzles to the exclusion of the larger context. In the face of this, we must think contextually and, in the case of meals, wonder about the mealtime situation framing the ritualized practice, for which the text offers one puzzling kernel of indirect evidence.

For many years, *sheva brachot*, the seven blessings recited at a rabbinic wedding, constituted such a puzzle. Studies of the words of this wedding blessing so absorbed scholars that the meal context faded into the background. Since, in the modern world, the seven blessings appears prominently in a ceremony separate from the meal, it was forgotten that in the ancient world these blessings belonged to a meal.[15] Once the "situation" of this seven-part blessing is recalled, then the nearby *huppah* and the sexual activity of the bridal couple loom larger, challenging us to search for contextual evidence for this "disembodied text." Consideration of the irrepressible wedding meal, peopled by real hosts and guests, a local community and neighboring communities, reveals new possibilities and challenges hinted at by the blessing.

The text of *sheva brachot*, or "seven blessings,"[16] does cite biblical texts, such as Genesis, pertaining to creation, or

Jeremiah, with its "streets of Jerusalem," in the last component of blessing:

> Speedily, O Lord our God, may there be heard in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem, the voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the voice of the singing of bridegrooms from their *huppot* (wedding chambers) and of youths from their feasts of song. Blessed are you, O Lord, who makes the bridegroom to rejoice with the bride. [17]

How exciting to see such a messianic vision! Nevertheless, attention to the context recalls that, despite the salience of the intertextual references, these words become associated with actions and rarely appear as merely a text.[18] The relevant passage in the Babylonian Talmud introduces these components by describing participants who interact with the meal and with each other, invoking the complexity of the surrounding culture and society. In other words, the blessing may allude to a prophetic landscape, but further attention to the text reveals how, in the immediate moment, the table continues to shape the surrounding society.

The narration continues by situating these blessings at the meal, thus helping us to understand their enactment:

> Levi came to the house of Rabbi to the wedding feast of R. Simeon his son [and] said five benedictions. R. Assi came to the house of R. Ashi to the wedding feast of Mar his son [and] said six benedictions. [19]

According to this account, people came to these feasts and said such blessings, and they disagreed on the proper number of blessings. The recitation of these six blessings enacts one side of the argument: "say this and not that." With Bell's caution in mind, we look to the text's invoked context as well as its intertextual puzzle. Levi's vision clashes with that of R. Assi at the wedding meal, *not* at the study table in the *bet midrash*, or so the Babylonian Talmud's telling would like to suggest. This point cannot be overemphasized. A significant number of rabbinic texts not only locate the occasions for teaching at *meals*,

but also explicitly or implicitly have their dialogue participants refer to those meal settings to make their point.[20]

Following out this thread, we can begin to see the stakes: weddings served as key venues for developing and consolidating the small-but-growing rabbinic movement. Guests included almost everyone, as we learn in various stories, including New Testament Gospel parables.[21] These wedding meals served as a powerful center for the community, the social networking of its day. Where better to insert rabbinic ideas for understanding creation, procreation, and prophetic ideals for the community? Meanwhile, through this rabbinic action, the rabbis suggested themselves as knowledgeable participants in such festivities.[22] The blessing in the context of the meal thus models the rabbis attending (and attending to) the larger community events, actions that could give them support and legitimacy. Focusing on the situation helps us understand the unfolding spectacle and ultimately allows us to see the *sheva brachot* as a new ritual response. In other words, we remember to focus on the meal and situate relevant practices within its orbit. In the case of weddings, because of a focus on meals, we can begin to observe changing dynamics in ritual practice around weddings that reveal important changes and developments in rabbinic Judaism.

3) *Shared Greek and Roman meal practices prompt particularized Jewish practice at meals in the early Jewish and Rabbinic world.*

While the earlier case emphasizes the importance of the meal context, meals also allow us a glimpse of particularly "Jewish" practice. The meal setting continually (re)establishes cultural boundaries and connections, based upon a foundation provided by Greek and Roman customs.[23] The introduction to this volume discusses Siegfried Stein's identification of symposiastic practices underlying the Passover Seder, and those replying to and building upon Stein.[24] More recently, Rosenblum's exploration of reclining draws connections between work on Classics and rabbinic literature.[25] Reclining served specific gendered,

political, social, cultural, economic, and rhetorical roles in the ancient Mediterranean.[26] Jews, like their ancient contemporaries, engaged in this bodily discourse. Likewise, Marks's chapter in this present volume makes the connection between the rabbinic Grace after Meals and libation practices, each invoking elaborate rules for precedence. And Brumberg-Kraus's chapter on performing midrash at the early rabbinic table recognizes the quintessential Hellenistic symposiastic practice of table talk as a distinctive feature of scholastic rabbinic meals. As new explorations reveal important connections, each paves the way for the next. Each study has made it easier to see the relationship of those meals described in Jewish literature and those we know of from other ancient sources.

4) *Greek and Roman meal practices and literary representations of them figure in the development of a rabbinic "sympotic ethic."*

Although it might be an overstatement to assert the sympotic ethic became *the* rabbinic ethic, the subsequent reception history of Greek and Roman symposiastic practices in rabbinic tradition suggests that these meal practices played a crucial role in the rabbinic movement's articulation and propagation of their values and norms. Conventional components of symposiastic practice were rabbinized. Rituals of rabbinic scholasticism akin to their contemporary non-Jewish sages' symposia elevated the rabbinic table. The popular philosophic sympotic values of table talk about table topics (*sumpotika* and *sumposiaka)*, of wine's friend-making power among learned table companions, and of *spoudaiogeloion* ("serious fun") were rabbinized and sacralized—as *divre torah al ha-shulhan* ("words of Torah about *and* over the table"); wine drinking requirements at Jewish holidays, Sabbath, and life cycle event ritual meals (enshrined in the saying: *ayn simhah ela be-yayin* ("there is no festive celebration without wine")); the four required cups of wine at the rabbinic Seder; the *kos shel berakhah* ("cup belonging to the blessing" for blessings before and after Sabbath and holiday meals), and the performance of midrash at the dinner table.

Likewise, symposiastic washing and reclining became the required rituals of *netilat yadaim* (lit., “raising the hands [to wash them]” with its accompanying blessing). Reclining even appears as one of the four ritual meal practices specified as distinguishing the night of the Passover Seder meal “from all other nights” in the Four Questions. Most Tannaitic and Amoraic descriptions of rabbinic meals use some form of the Hebrew or Aramaic verbs “to recline” as almost a shorthand to refer to or to set the scene of a meal. The importance of the rabbinic sympotic ethic is to be seen not only in its Roman imperial context, but also in the postrabbinic reception history of rabbinic meals in medieval *sifrei hanhagot* (“conduct books”) about eating, like Rabbenu Bahya ben Asher’s *Shulhan shel Arba*, the *Tu Bishvat haggadot*, and the contemporary expressions in the New Jewish Food Movement.[27] In other words, a sympotic ethic remained relevant in certain Jewish circles long after the period of its origin.

5) *Scholarly understanding of the centrality of meals provides independent confirmations (or challenges) to ideas developed according to other methodologies.*

The aforementioned first four Theses each started with attention to methods and meals as important ways to view the ancient world. We also observe that other research can be affirmed or strengthened by appealing to its consonance with a developing understanding of Jewish meal practices. Judith Hauptman’s work provides a fine example of how the centrality of meals provides confirmation. Hauptman has been developing a sustained challenge to accepted ideas about the relationship of the Mishnah and the Tosefta, exploring the possibility that the later Tosefta sometimes witnesses an UrMishnah, an earlier version than the Mishnah itself preserves. In the case of Passover, Hauptman wrestles with the question of which came first: the order of the Seder presented in the Mishnah, with the story-telling prior to the eating of the meal, or the Tosefta’s version, which prescribes the meal before the intellectual exercise:

> What is at issue is when the seder and haggadah as we know them developed. Oral traditions, of which we have no record at all,

> cannot provide us with an answer. Let me suggest that it is the redactor of the Mishnah who introduced the requirement of telling the story at the seder and who deliberately chose to turn the study session into a haggadah.[28]

Consideration of the Roman Banquet form, based on the Greek sympotic idea, certainly supports her argument that a symposiastic discussion of laws that occurred *after* the meal in the Tosefta constitutes the norm, so that we recognize the Tosefta preserving an earlier Seder, while the Mishnah's version appears to record a new development. Although Hauptman's overriding questions concern the Mishnah and the Tosefta as a whole, her attention to the nature of the meal and symposium, and the way particular meals engage in and modify this paradigm, leads her to confirm important changes that had been overlooked.

We can also imagine this confirmation process working the other way around, challenging conclusions that have ignored the meal and the meal's context of social formation. For example, recently, Gil Klein in "Torah in Triclinia" challenged earlier conclusions by raising the issue of whether the *bet midrash* or the rabbinic banquet is the setting for certain rabbinic meal traditions.[29] Correlating the architectural evidence of dining rooms at archeological sites such as Sepphoris, with literary accounts of rabbis referring to their surroundings at a banquet to make a legal point (e.g., *t. Ber.* 5:1–2), Klein makes a strong case for meals themselves as the original setting for their teaching.[30]

6) *Understanding of Hellenistic and Roman meals gives us an important lens to consider the rhetoric of women's idealized relationship with meals in tension with actual practice.*

Our consideration of meals suggests that meals can provide an instructive and underutilized way to look at gender. Analyzing the complexity and performance of meals contributes important nuances to the study of women in the ancient world and constructions of gender. Kathleen Corley's *Private Women, Public Meals* opened up these questions, including important differences in the roles of women at Roman versus Greek meals.[31] Building upon this, Carolyn Osiek, Angela

Standhartinger, and Ellen Aitken, all combine an interest in women and early Christian meals. Recently Osiek looks at the evidence of Roman archeology;[32] and Standhartinger surveys pre-Christian and Christian ancient meals, including Jewish meals in Philo.[33] Aitken looks at the meal as the "generative matrix" that fosters traditions, and thus serves as a locus for considering how the Jesus movement "remembers" women. In the absence of definitive evidence, Aitken considers alternatives, including situating women in attendance as part of the symposium, on the one hand, or separately, on the other.[34] Likewise Marks, in considering Greek, Roman, Christian, and Jewish wedding meals, finds that the silence of a text about who attends the meal does not invariably signal the absence of women, but that such ambiguity requires multiple answers.[35]

This approach to ambiguous evidence concerning gender appears elsewhere in important studies discussing Jewish women: their work lives, sex lives, and religious lives.[36] Thus studies of Jewish women and studies of meals already share certain elements, each study providing small steps that correct earlier glib portraits. The interactions and traditions of the meal can contribute to the study of gender, revealing overlooked possibilities. Rosenblum's work in this volume considers gender in the creation of food in rabbinic kitchens; elsewhere, he investigates the question of women reclining at rabbinic meals and the barriers to participation.[37] In this volume also, Hauptman returns to the question of women at the Passover meal and mealtime discussions.[38] Attention to the meal as social location might also allow for expansion of already fine studies. Exploring the depiction of women as sorcerers in rabbinic literature, Rebecca Lesses considers the rabbinic teaching that one should pass by "food left on the road" because the "daughters of Israel . . . might have used the food for sorcery."[39] Here, amidst other explorations, is a relatively isolated glimpse of food. Would further consideration of the meal and the place of food help explore the relationship between these rabbis and these women? Marjorie Lehman investigates how the *sukkah* may be a domestic space like a house and the implications of this concerning women and construction of gender. She finds familiar ambiguities. When the rabbis consider women, they

present them as exempt from the obligation of the *sukkah*, but when the rabbis consider priests, their argument suggests the involvement of wives.[40] Here too, attention to the meal as a central feature of the *sukkah* might add yet another perspective.[41]

7) *In the Greek and Roman periods, Jews used kashrut as a distinct foodway to distinguish themselves both from non-Jews and from other Jews.*

In addition to revealing important ways to study early Judaism and confirming other kinds of studies, an examination of meals demonstrates Jewish wrestling with meal customs as central to developing self-understanding. Thus, the four Theses in this third and final section examine the way Jews expressed and constructed their social identities specifically in their performance of meals. While Milgrom and others have argued that the biblical food laws served to separate Jew from Gentile, the evidence for this separation does not truly appear until the Second Temple period.[42] Beginning in the Second Temple period, both Jews and non-Jews begin to notice that Jews separate themselves at meals and have peculiar culinary practices (most notably, their abstention from pork). Of course, this does not mean that all Jews did so. It also does not mean that all of these practices are ancient. In fact, we have evidence that many of them are new to the period.

Moving into the rabbinic period, we encounter a myriad of new culinary and commensal practices (often centered around purity).[43] The rabbis use these distinct practices to distinguish themselves from both non-Jews and nonrabbinic Jews. For example, as David Kraemer persuasively argues, the rabbinic expansive interpretation of the biblical commandment prohibiting cooking a kid in its mother's milk results in a bifurcation of the Jewish community in antiquity: between those who follow rabbinic law and those who do not.[44] The meal therefore becomes a locus of difference, contestation, and identity construction.

8) *In the rabbinic transformations of Biblical priestly sacrificial traditions to the rabbinic table there is a shift in*

emphasis from food preparation to table talk as what distinguished the "rabbinic Jew" from others.

Paralleling this attention to what was eaten, other developments of early rabbinic table practices also transformed meals into a locus of intra-Jewish group differentiation. Rabbinic ideas about what constituted priest-like behaviors regarding the table changed, and as we shall show, so did their definition of the "non-rabbinic Jews" whom they called *ammei haaretz* (lit., "people of the land).[45] The Tannaim did not adopt the earlier Pharisees' *whole* program of eating properly tithed food in a state of ritual purity. For while the Tannaim appreciated the Pharisees' intensification of Jewish norms by having nonpriests eat like priests, the Pharisees "pretend-to-be-priest" behavior depended upon a Temple system of sacrifice and tithing that required actual hereditary priests. This is not possible for the Tannaim after 70 CE.

One can see this shift especially in rabbinic interpretations of the "*torah* of beast and fowl," that is, the phrase summarizing the Biblical dietary laws in Lev. 11:46. They reflect the development of new, postbiblical conceptions of "*torah*." Normally in Leviticus, "*torah*" refers to instructions about sacrifices and purity either for priests or instructions by priests to ordinary Israelites on how to be holy, for example,"this is the *torah* of the burnt offering [*'olah*]" (6:2); "this is the *torah* of the grain offering [*minhah*]" (6:7); "this is the *torah* of her who bears a child [*ha-yoledet*]" (12:7); or "this is the *torah* of beast and fowl" (11:46). But even in these priestly *torot,* the dietary rules ("the *torah* of beast and fowl") stand out as rules that the priests are to teach all Israelites to observe, in order to "be holy," that is, to be like an order of priests. The pre–70 CE *haverim/*Pharisees seemed to adopt this general idea that ordinary Israelites could be holy like priests through their dietary choices, but not just by distinguishing between clean and unclean animals—*kashrut*. They also insisted that ordinary Israelites could be holy like priests by observing tithing and purity rules, which for a population who ate meat relatively infrequently, afforded many more opportunities to "be holy" on a daily basis. Moreover,

these tithing and purity traditions attributed to the *haverim/* Pharisees do not seem to use the term "*torah*" to refer to verbal instructions about tithing and purity, that is, they do not seem to advocate explicit talking about the rules of tithing and purity over the table. Rather, the pre–70 CE *haverim/* Pharisees expressed these tithing and purity rules as the prerequisites (perhaps in the literary form of lists of meal rules) for members to gather for table fellowship in Hellenistic associations, not specifically as talking points for their table conversations.

While some scholars are reluctant to identify the Tannaitic literature's *haverim* and *havurot* with the Gospels' Pharisees, I (JBK) am not.[46] As Jacob Neusner demonstrated long ago in *From Politics to Piety: The Emergence of Pharisaic Judaism*:

> The Gospels' picture conforms to the rabbinical traditions about the Pharisees, *which center upon the laws of tithing and ritual purity, defining what and with whom one may eat, that is, table fellowship.*[47]

These are mostly nonverbal symbolic actions. Through their self-conscious engagement in more or less priest-like activities, not primarily studying or teaching Torah at their tables, the pre-Tannaitic Pharisees turned their own non-Temple tables into what later generations referred to as a *mikdash me'at*—a "mini-Temple." Like their Jewish contemporaries among the Qumran Essenes and early Christians, they sacralized their communal meals as *priestly* service of God outside the Temple, in what could be called the "ritualizations of the metaphor" that "we are priests."[48] They called Jews who did not follow their rules "*ʿammei ha-ʾaretz*."[49] While some table talk was part of the Pharisees' characteristic meal activities, for example, in the form of table blessings and the prescribed psalms (*Hallel*) and verses that participants were obliged to say in the Passover Seder (according to the traditions attributed to them in Tannaitic literature), the overwhelming majority of meal rules attributed to them had to do with meal *preparations.*

But the post–70 CE Tannaim wanted to stress that teaching Torah verbally, especially at the table, not just tithing and

observing purity rules like priests, was *what was really equivalent* to the priests' service in the Temple. We see traditions that express the Tannaitic rabbis' ambivalence about associating themselves with the Pharisees' table fellowship practices and distancing themselves from them, by suggesting that they are archaic. This is particularly evident in the rabbinic traditions distinguishing "*ammei-haaretz* with respect to tithing and purity" from "*ammei-haaretz* with respect to Torah learning," for example, *m. Demai* 2:3. This shift in focus is particularly evident in the *sugya* in *b. Pesaḥ* 49b containing a series of *baraitot* contrasting *talmidei hakhamim* and *ʿammei ha-ʾaretz*. Particularly of note is this *baraita*:

> Our sages taught, It is forbidden for an *ʿam ha-ʾaretz* to eat meat, as it is written, 'This is the Torah of the beast and fowl.' [Lev. 11:46] All who engage in Torah are permitted to eat the meat of beasts and fowl, and all who do not engage in Torah are forbidden to eat beast and fowl.

While this tradition concerns itself with what an *ʿam ha-ʾaretz* and "all who engage in Torah" may eat, it nevertheless represents the shift of terminology from earlier tannaitic traditions contrasting the *ʿammei ha-ʾaretz* to those who do not tithe or purify themselves before meals, to the later ones opposing *ʿammei ha-ʾaretz* to "those who engage in torah," or "those who serve in the *bet midrash*," that is, to *talmidei hakhamim* (*b. Pesaḥ* 49b, *m. Demai* 2:3). It belongs to a stage of development after the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE in the second or third century CE.[50] In these traditions, Torah study now counts as the distinguishing qualification of the Tannaim and Amoraim's ideal type: the "sage"—the *hakham*.[51]

So how does one engage in Torah at a meal? By speaking words of Torah at the table, as the well-known passage from *m. Avot* 3:3 articulates:

> Rabbi Simeon said: If three have eaten at one table and have not spoken over it words of the Torah, it is as though they had eaten of the sacrifices of the dead, for it is written (Isa 28:8) "For all tables are full of vomit, no place is without filthiness." But if three have eaten at one table and have spoken over it words of the Torah,

> it is as if they had eaten from the table of God, for it is written (Ezek 41:22) "He said to me, 'This is the table which is before the LORD.'"

Hence, by paying attention to when and how Pharisees and Tannaim (and later Amoraim) perform their identities at *meals*, we notice two important things. First, the metaphorical meaning and symbolic value they attach to their meal activities is the same: what we are doing is like the divine service of God that the hereditary priests in the Temple in Jerusalem performed. However, secondly, the meal rituals by which they ritualize this metaphor of performing sacred rites like priests are different. While Torah table talk probably had its origins in Pharisaic meal practices, the symbolic actions that conveyed the Pharisees' program were primarily the *rituals of preparation* for the meal and the eligibility of their guests. But for the Tannaim and their successors, as Mishnah Avot 3:3 states explicitly, the Torah table talk during the meal itself became the ritual way to perform a divine service like priests. Thus we see how important it is to examine the reception history of rabbinic meals (and their biblical antecedents) in order to recognize when the values and meanings attributed to what seems to be a common idea change. In other words, while the idea that Jews can perform priest-like activities apart from the Temple "had legs" throughout Jewish history, which actions and intentions actually conveyed that ritualized metaphor were not the same over time.[52]

9) *Rabbinic table ethics have a "civilizing" function reflecting and promoting the values of a rabbinic scholastic class.*

Recent trends in rabbinic scholarship suggest that the rabbinic sage was a recognizable social type, something like a sophist (of the Second Sophistic, not exactly Plato's sophists); sages, teachers, and bureaucrats who promoted the civilizing benefits of their scholastic program to establish their authority and influence.[53] Meal settings served as important contexts for performance, demonstration, and rhetorical advocacy of scholastic values in general (e.g., as in Athenaeus's *Deipnosophistae*), and rabbinic values in particular. They provided: "fixed" ritual

practices intended to elevate eating from animalistic activity, including prescribed blessings, wine drinking, washing, reclining, and perhaps most important, improvisational displays of virtuoso table talk. All of these sympotic conventions enabled the rabbis of the late Roman empire to idealize the *talmid hakham* ("disciple of the Sage") as a kind of *Jewish* deipnosophist, a rabbinic "dinner table philosopher." The rabbinic table provided opportunities for the sages to enact the civilizing power of Torah at the table, especially in their apt midrashic application of biblical verses and clever repartee with hosts and guests, demonstrating knowledge of how to behave like a *mensch*.[54]

In rabbinic meal settings, the participants performed their social ranks, practices that honored extraordinary improvisational performers of "words of Torah about the table over the table" (*talmidei hakhamim* par excellence) and Torah-learning over age-based seniority. Meal rituals such as serving bread, leading *birkat hamazon* ("blessing after the meal"), or where one reclined in the triclinium arrangement became opportunities to publicly honor the Torah scholars.[55] This is the historical significance of the shift pointed out earlier, viewed in the broader context of the development of a class of sage/bureaucrats and sophists throughout the late Roman empire. Pharisaic symposiastic practices became a philosophic sympotic ethic among the Tannaim and Amoraim, that is, one that stressed rabbinic "philosophizing" at the table (i.e., Torah talk, midrash). Or better, the conventions of Greek and Roman *philosophical* symposia become more prominent at the rabbinic table, because they served their scholastic agenda magnificently.

10) *Rabbinic meals exploit the multisensory, synaesthetic experience of table rituals to embody rabbinic communal values.*

Martin Jaffee and others after him make a compelling case that early rabbinic ideology understood and represented sages and their disciples as embodied Torah.[56] The multisensory

experience of meals noted by some evolutionary psychologists offers a fruitful focus for examining the psychosomatic mechanisms by which Jewish rabbinic ideology was internalized and embodied.[57] Rabbinic meals exploit the reciprocal play of talking and eating—of tasting, smelling, seeing, touching, hearing *together*—to create powerful emotional experiences. Meal rituals in general are effective ways to cultivate a group's communal values and sense of experiencing themselves as a community, what ritual theorists call the feeling of *communitas*.[58] So as Ninian Smart, the great twentieth-century scholar of religious studies remarked in *Worldviews: Crosscultural Explorations of Human Beliefs*:

> Consider how we often celebrate events through a banquet—a special meal expressing the togetherness of a group usually relating to some cause or some association—a school reunion, a political party, a retirement dinner, a wedding, and so on.
>
> Once we begin to think about the meaning of food and drink, we are given a marvelous opportunity to think again about what is, after all, so close to us that we fail to notice it: our whole way of living and acting is drenched in meanings.[59]

What in particular are the communal myths they convey? Is it the story that Alan King quipped that fits all Jewish holidays: "They tried to get us, we survived, let's eat!" Even if "the Jewish story" could be reduced to that (spoiler alert—it cannot), *how* are those meanings conveyed at rabbinic meals? We already touched upon this in the discussion of the Creation and messianic era stories alluded to in the seven blessings at rabbinic wedding banquets,[60] and Brumberg-Kraus argues this point in "Performing Myth, Performing Midrash at Rabbinic Meals," elsewhere in this volume. It is a fruitful line of inquiry to examine the effect (or at least intended effects) of rabbinic meal rituals in light of the psychology of taste and the other senses.[61]

Rabbinic meal rituals not only turn these stories or snippets of stories into ritualized metaphorical actions, but they also use these words and the choreography of the meal itself to accentuate the gustatory, aromatic, visual, acoustic, and tactile sensory experiences of the meals. They are a synaesthetic "mode

of paying attention."[62] Or to put it in Clifford Geertz's terms, performing sacred scripts/Scriptures at Jewish meals have proved to be an effective way of "formulating a general order of existence . . . to establish powerful, pervasive, and long lasting moods and motivations" in Jews "by clothing [them] with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic."[63] The "system of symbols" inscribed in the Oral and Written Torah recited and riffed on improvisationally at the Jewish celebratory table become so real, you can taste them!

These ten Theses push the field to taste early Jewish meals in novel ways. Twenty-five years ago, Jewish and Hellenistic meal practices were seen like meat and milk, separate entities that could not (and should not) be combined. Today, we argue against that presumption, envisioning instead a complex variety of practices brought up to the same table. In doing so, we build upon the seminal work of Stein, Smith, and Klinghardt, among others. Like many others, we reject the facile and artificial boundaries drawn between early Judaism and its surrounding social, political, economic, and culinary milieu.

Bringing the theory from fields such as Food Studies, Ritual Studies, and Gender Studies to the table allows us to not only understand better the academic study of early Jewish meals, but also fleshes out concepts relevant to the study of Judaism in antiquity in general. For example, scholars of early Judaism have begun to question the atypicality of Judaism in a variety of contexts, as time and again recent studies conclude that early Judaism is clearly a product of its physical, social, and temporal location.[64] In short, it is an ancient Mediterranean religion. The application of various theories therefore helps to situate early Jewish meals within both the larger academic study of meals and the larger academic study of early Judaism.

The serious study of Jewish (and other) meals is still in its infancy. Our essay, and in many ways this volume as a whole, provides a snapshot of the current terrain of the field. But like any map, there are borders. Since it is far easier to be a historian than a prophet, we cannot predict the terrain that lies ahead. What we do know is that we continue to pick up more

traveling companions along the way. We look forward to exploring together.

Appendix: The Ten Theses

1) Theories developed in other disciplines, including sociology, anthropology, and especially food studies contribute a methodological foundation to the study of the early Jewish table.
2) Any early Jewish ritual involving meals must seriously investigate meals, as Catherine Bell observes about ritual: "When abstracted from its immediate context, an activity is not quite the same activity."[65]
3) Shared Greek and Roman meal practices prompt particularized Jewish practice at meals in the early Jewish and Rabbinic world.
4) Greek and Roman meal practices and literary representations of them figure in the development of a *rabbinic* "sympotic ethic."
5) Scholarly understanding of the centrality of meals provides independent confirmations (or challenges) to ideas developed according to other methodologies.
6) Understanding of Hellenistic and Roman meals gives us an important lens to consider the rhetoric of women's idealized relationship with meals in tension with actual practice.
7) In the Greek and Roman periods, Jews used *kashrut* as a distinct foodway to distinguish themselves both from non-Jews and from other Jews.
8) In the rabbinic transformations of Biblical priestly sacrificial traditions to the rabbinic table, there is a shift in emphasis from food preparation to table talk as what distinguished the "rabbinic Jew" from others.
9) Rabbinic table ethics have a "civilizing" function reflecting and promoting the values of a rabbinic scholastic class.
10) Rabbinic meals exploit the multisensory, synaesthetic experience of table rituals to embody rabbinic communal values.

Notes

1. We wish to thank all those who participated in the 2010 SBL session on "Meals in the Greco-Roman World." Most particularly, we want to thank Heather White for her thoughtful and helpful reading of an early draft of this chapter.
2. For survey of scholarship and method before 2002 see Jonathan Brumberg-Kraus, "Meals as Midrash: A Survey of Ancient Meals in Jewish Studies Scholarship" in *Food and Judaism*, ed. L. J. Greenspoon, R. A. Simkins, and G. Shapiro, vol. 15 (Omaha: Creighton University Press, 2005), 317. Originally presented as paper for the SBL Seminar on "Meals in the Greco-Roman World" in 2002.
3. See, for example, Hayim Lapin, *Rabbis as Romans: The Rabbinic Movement in Palestine, 100–400 CE* (New York: Oxford, 2012).
4. The extent to which these Ten Theses are useful for describing other data sets can be assessed by others (or ourselves, but in other essays).
5. See Appendix for all ten Theses.
6. See, for example, Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (New York: Routledge, 1966); repr., New York: Routledge, 1999.
7. For example, see Michael Beer, *Taste or Taboo: Dietary Choices in Antiquity* (Devon: Prospect Books, 2010); and the classic of ancient food studies, Peter Garnsey, *Food and Society in Classical Antiquity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).
8. For example, see Andrew McGowan, *Ascetic Eucharists: Food and Drink in Early Christian Ritual Meals* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Dennis E.Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist: The Banquet in the Early Christian World* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003); Matthias Klinghardt, *Gemeinschaftsmahl und Mahlgemeinschaft: Soziologie und Liturgie frühchristlicher Mahlfeiern*. Texte und Arbeiten zum neutestamentlichen Zeitalter 13. (Tübingen: Francke Verlag, 1996); and Hal Taussig, *In the Beginning was the Meal: Social Experimentation and Early Christian Identity* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2009).
9. Brumberg-Kraus, "'Bread from Heaven, Bread from the Earth:'" Recent Trends in Jewish Food History in *Writing Food History: A Global Perspective*, ed. K. Claflin and P. Scholliers (London: Berg, 2012). That said, this dialogue is still a bit one-sided. While Jewish food studies have drawn much from general food studies, we could do more to make our work known to general food scholars. Brumberg-Kraus's piece is a gesture in that direction, as are Weingarten's numerous contributions to the annual Proceedings

of Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery and other venues regarding the archeological and Talmudic evidence for ancient Jewish meals:, "A Feast for the Eyes: Women and Baking in the Talmudic Literature"; "Charoset"; "Children's Foods in the Talmudic Literature"; "Eggs in the Talmud"; "'Magiros', 'Nahtom' and Women at Home: Cooks in the Talmud"; "Wild Foods in the Talmud: The Influence of Religious Restrictions on Consumption."

10. See Amy Bentley, *Eating for Victory: Food Rationing and the Politics of Domesticity* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998).
11. See, for example, Jordan D. Rosenblum *Food and Identity in Early Rabbinic Judaism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 115.
12. On modern kosher laws, see. for example, Timothy B. Lytton, *Kosher: Private Regulation in the Age of Industrial Food* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013); and on the American food system, see Marion Nestle, *Food Politics: How the Food Industry Influences Nutrition and Health* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); repr., Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007.. In fact, Nestle provides a blurb for the back of Lytton's book.
13. See Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney, *Rice as Self: Japanese Identities through Time* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993); Arjun Appadurai, "How to Make a National Cuisine: Cookbooks in Contemporary India," *Comparative Studies* 30, no. 1 (1988); and Rosenblum, *Food and Identity in Early Rabbinic Judaism*, 46.
14. Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 81.
15. The text of this blessing first appears in the Babylonian Talmud of the fifth to sixth centuries CE.
16. The title "seven blessings" refers to a blessing over wine followed by six additional component blessings.
17. Jer 33: 10–11, in *b. Ketub.* 7b–8a, translation adapted from Samuel Daiches, *The Babylonian Talmud: Kethuboth* (United Kingdom: Soncino Press, 1936). See Susan Marks, *First Came Marriage: The Rabbinic Appropriation of Early Jewish Wedding Ritual* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2013), 140–152 for a list and discussion of biblical components prior to an examination of the larger context.
18. See also Brumberg-Kraus, chapter 5 in this volume.
19. *b. Ketub.* 8a.
20. See especially Gil Klein, "Torah in Triclinia: The Rabbinic Banquet and the Significance of Architecture," *JQR* 102, no.3 (2012): 325–370; and Brumberg-Kraus, chapter 5 in this volume.

21. See. for example, Luke 14:7–24. Though in Luke's account here, Jesus tells these parables in order to point out that his proto-rabbinic Pharisee table companions are not too happy about this! And in the Mishnah, the rabbis taught that men should not keep their wives from attending weddings, as it was such a central communal event: A man must divorce his wife rather than prohibit her from all "houses of mourning and houses of (wedding) feasting," *m. Ketub.* 7.5. Rabbinic concern for the social function of weddings is also discussed in Rosenblum, chapter 3 in this volume.
22. Marks, *First Came Marriage*, 135–187. This is one piece of a larger argument concerning why this development of wedding ritual takes place in the Amoraic or later rabbinic period and not prior.
23. We refer to "Greek and Roman meal customs" as opposed to the hyphenated term "Greco-Roman" or the phrase "Greek and Roman meals," which conceals the complicated relationship between the two cultures in their interaction with the indigenous cultures of the regions where they held sway. That is, Hellenistic practices in the later Greek Empire and the eastern part of territories then governed by Rome were not exactly the same. That said, we did not want to use overly cumbersome terminology, and so settled upon "Greek and Roman meal customs." Although inexact, the very messiness of the terms proves preferable when focusing upon customs and practices. We are grateful to our Seminar colleague Nancy Evans for cautioning us about using the term "Greco-Roman."
24. Stein, "The Influence of Symposia." See Marks, in the Introduction of this volume for further discussion.
25. Rosenblum, "Inclined to Decline Reclining?, Women, Corporeality, and Dining Posture in Early Rabbinic Literature," in *Meals in the Early Christian World: Social Formation, Experimentation, and Conflict at the Table,* ed. D. E. Smith and H. Taussig (New York: Palgrave Macmillian, 2012). drawing on Matthew B. Roller, *Dining Posture in Ancient Rome: Bodies, Values, and Status* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006).
26. See also Gil Klein, "Torah in Triclinia: The Rabbinic Banquet and the Significance of Architecture," *JQR* 102, no. 3 (2012): 325–370, who draws upon the architecture of triclinia, especially the archeological evidence in Sepphoris, to explicate the meaning of rabbinic banquet texts.
27. See Brumberg-Kraus, "Communal meals. II. Judaism." *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009).

28. Judith Hauptman, "How Old Is the Haggadah?," *Judaism* 51, no.1 (2002): 9.
29. Klein, "Torah in Triclinia," 340.
30. Klein, "Torah in Triclinia," 336ff.
31. Kathleen E. Corley*, Private Women, Public Meals: Social Conflict in the Synoptic Tradition* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1993).
32. Carolyn Osiek and Margaret Y. MacDonald, with Janet H. Tulloch, *A Woman's Place: House Churches in Earliest Christianity* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2006)*;* and Osiek, "What Kinds of Meals Did Julia Felix Have? A Case Study of the Archaeology of the Banquet" in *Meals in the Early Christian World: Social Formation, Experimentation, and Conflict at the Table,* ed. D. E. Smith and H. Taussig, 37–56 (New York: Palgrave Macmillian, 2012).
33. Angela Standhartinger, "Women in Early Christian Meal Gatherings," in *Meals in the Early Christian World: Social Formation, Experimentation, and Conflict at the Table,* ed. D. E. Smith and H. Taussig (New York: Palgrave Macmillian, 2012).
34. Ellen Bradshaw Aitken, "Remembering and Remembered Women in Greco-Roman Meals," in *Meals in the Early Christian World: Social Formation, Experimentation, and Conflict at the Table,* ed. D. E. Smith and H. Taussig, 120–121 (New York: Palgrave Macmillian, 2012).
35. Marks, "Present and Absent: Women at Greco-Roman Wedding Meals," in *Meals in the Early Christian World: Social Formation, Experimentation, and Conflict at the Table,* ed. D. E. Smith and H. Taussig (New York: Palgrave MacMillian, 2012).
36. For examples, see Cynthia M. Baker, *Rebuilding the House of Israel: Architectures of Gender in Jewish Antiquity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002); Charlotte E Fonrobert, *Menstrual Purity: Rabbinic and Christian Reconstructions of Biblical Gender* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000); Maxine L. Grossman, "Reading for Gender in the Damascus Document," *Dead Sea Discoveries* 11, no. 2 (2004): 212–239; Judith Hauptman, *Rereading the Rabbis: A Woman's Voice* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998); Ross S. Kraemer, *Unreliable Witnesses: Religion, Gender, and History in the Greco-Roman Mediterranean* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); and Miriam B. Peskowitz, *Spinning Fantasies: Rabbis, Gender, and History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).
37. Rosenblum, chapter 3. See also Rosenblum, *Food and Identity in Early Rabbinic Judaism*, and Rosenblum, "Inclined to Decline Reclining?"

38. Hauptman, chapter 3 in this volume.
39. Rebecca Lesses, "Exe(o)rcising Power: Women as Sorceresses, Exorcists, and Demonesses," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 69, no. 2 (2001): 343–375, see esp. 351.
40. Marjorie Lehman, "The Gendered Rhetoric of Sukkah Observance," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 96, no. 5 (2006): 309–335, see esp. 331.
41. See also in Rosenblum, *Food and Identity in Early Rabbinic Judaism*, 130–131 and 170–173.
42. David M. Freidenreich, *Foreigners and Their Food: Constructing Otherness in Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Law* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011); David C. Kraemer, *Jewish Eating and Identity through the Ages* (New York: Routledge, 2007); Rosenblum, *Food and Identity in Early Rabbinic Judaism*, 36–45.
43. As Jacob Neusner, *From Politics to Piety: The Emergence of Pharisaic Judaism*. 2nd ed. (New York: Ktav, 1979), noted many years ago.
44. Kraemer, *Jewish Eating and Identity*, 50–52.
45. While *'am ha-aretz* (plu., *'ammei ha-aretz*) is a term originally found in the Hebrew Bible meaning something like "the common people," I (JBK) deliberately do not translate it here. What it means in Rabbinic Hebrew depends on the context, as what follows shows. While it has come to mean "ignoramus," that connotation derives from the particular Tannaitic use of the designating someone who does not engage in Torah, that is, is ignorant of rabbinic Torah learning.
46. Though not all mentions of *haverim* and *havurot* in the Mishnah and Tosefta may refer to groups that tithed meticulously and observed rituals of purity like Pharisees, some, particularly those preserved in *m.* and *t. Demai*, do. It is therefore likely that some Pharisees were *haverim* or *ne'emanim*, but not all *haverim* and *ne'emanim* were Pharisees. The distinguishing characteristics of the *haverim* and *ne'emanim* were their tithing, purity rituals, and their rules for table fellowship. The synoptic gospels depict these characteristics, too, as distinguishing the Pharisees from their own Christian groups.
47. Neusner, *From Politics to Piety*, 80.
48. See Brumberg-Kraus, "Meat-Eating and Jewish Identity" and "'Not by Bread Alone . . .':"; Ivan Marcus, *Rituals of Childhood* (New Haven, CT: Yale, 1996), 6.
49. Oppenheimer, *The 'Am Ha-aretz: A Study in the Social History*, 170. The *haverim* were probably the New Testament's and Josephus' Pharisees, who sought to heighten Jewish national identity under

Roman rule by intensifying the norms of Jewish behavior. In particular, they adapted the priestly standards of purity, and tithed food for nonpriests, to encourage "lay" Israelites to participate in their table fellowship practices, as if they were priests. In other words, the *haverim/*Pharisees' table fellowship practices were a strategy of ritualized "street theater" intended to win Jewish "converts" to their way of practice (See Brumberg-Kraus, "Were the Pharisees a Conversionist Sect?" unpublished manuscript, 2002 (http://acunix.wheatonma.edu/jkraus/articles/Pharisees.htm)..

50. As Aharon Oppenheimer, *The 'Am Ha-aretz: A Study in the Social History of the Jewish People in the Hellenistic-Roman Period* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1977), 175, suggests regarding this *baraita* in *b. Pesaḥ*. 49b.
51. See Brumberg-Kraus, "Meat-eating and Jewish Identity."
52. Moreover, we would be remiss if we overlooked the fundamental traumatic event that provided the impetus for this idea to take root in the rabbinic program, in all its forms and transformation—the destruction of the Temple and the priestly sacrificial cult dependent on it in 70 CE. As the Talmud puts it bluntly, "R. Yohanan and R. Elazar both said: While the Temple is functioning, the altar atones for a person. And now, when there is no functioning Temple, the table of a person atones for him" (*b. Menaḥ*. 97a). But the Tannaitic tradition is not always so blunt, often adopting a strategy that understates the traumatic reason why rabbinic Judaism substitutes the table for the altar, particularly in its development of Jewish meal practices, like the Passover Seder. See especially Baruch M. Bokser, *The Origins of the Seder*: The Passover Rite and Early Rabbinic Judaism (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).
53. See Henry A. Fischel, *Rabbinic Literature and Greco-Roman Philosophy* (Leiden: Brill, 1973); Klein, "Torah in Triclinia;" Brumberg-Kraus, "'Not by Bread Alone . . .'"; and Jonathan Wyn Schofer, "Self, Subject, and Chosen Subjection: Rabbinic Ethics and Comparative Possibilities," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 33, no. 2 (2005): 255–291; and *Confronting Vulnerability: The Body and the Divine in Rabbinic Ethics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).
54. On *derekh eretz* traditions, see Schofer, "Self, Subject, and Chosen Subjection"; Brumberg-Kraus, "Better a Meal of Vegetables with Love": The Symbolic Meaning of Vegetables in Rabbinic and Post-Rabbinic Midrash of Proverbs 15.17," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 104, no. 1 (Winter 2014) forthcoming.

55. See Brumberg-Kraus, "Meals as Midrash"; Klein, "Torah in Triclinia".
56. Martin S. Jaffee. "A Rabbinic Ontology of the Written and Spoken Word; on Discipleship, Transformative Knowledge, and the Living Texts of Oral Torah." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 65, no. 3 (1997): 525–549; Martin S. Jaffee, *Torah in the Mouth*: Writing and Oral Tradition in Palestinian Judaism, 200 BCE–400 CE (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001). Jaffee, however, does not focus on meals *per se* as the locus for rabbinic embodiments of Torah, but rather on oral performances of rabbinic teaching, memorization, and recitation, what he calls "torah in the mouth." That said, the possibilities for explicitly connecting his "torah in the mouth" to what we are saying about rabbinic meals are quite suggestive. Much later, at the end of the nineteenth century, the Hasidic rebbe Judah Aryeh Leib Alter ("the Sefat Emet") basically equates the acts of talking and eating during the Passover Seder as both "mitzvoth of the mouth," in his Haggadah commentary, *Hagadah Shel Pesah*.
57. Paul Rozin, "Food Is Fundamental, Fun, Frightening, and Far-reaching" *Social Research* 66 (1999): 9–30; and Rozin Jonathan Haidt, Clark McCauley, and Sumio Imada, "Disgust: The Cultural Evolution of a Food-based Emotion" in *Food Preferences and Taste: Continuity and Change* (Providence, RI: Berghahn Books, 1997).
58. Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (New York: de Gruyter, 1969).
59. Ninian Smart, *Worldviews: Crosscultural Explorations of Human Beliefs* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2000).
60. See Marks, *First Came Marriage*, 135–187.
61. See Rozin, "Food Is Fundamental", and for interpretations of the sensory dimension of ancient Jewish texts and rituals, see Deborah A. Green, *The Aroma of Righteousness*: *Scent and Seduction in Rabbinic Life and Literature* (University Park, PA: Penn State Press, 2011); Yael Avrahami, *The Senses of Scripture: Sensory Perception in the Hebrew Bible* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2011); and Brumberg-Kraus, "'Truly the Ear Tests Words as the Palate Tastes Food' (Job 12:11): Synaesthetic Food Metaphors, 2.
62. On ritual as a mode of paying attention, see J. Z. Smith, *To Take Place* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987); and for the synaesthetic dimension of Jewish meals, Brumberg-Kraus "'Truly the Ear Tests Words" as the Palate Tastes Food' (Job 12:11): Synaesthetic Food Metaphors.

63. Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 90.
64. See n. 2. The wording regarding Judaism's "atypicality" comes from Seth Schwartz, *Were the Jews a Mediterranean Society? Reciprocity and Solidarity in Ancient Judaism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 36.
65. Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, 81.

SECTION I

CHAPTER 2

Thinking about the Ten Theses in Relation to the Passover Seder and Women's Participation

Judith Hauptman

The ten Theses on the subject of Hellenistic meal practices resonate with me, a rabbinics researcher. I fully agree that "any early Jewish ritual involving meals must seriously investigate meals" (#2) and that "Greek and Roman meal practices prompt particularized Jewish practice at meals in the early Jewish and rabbinic world" (#3).[1] This chapter shows in concrete ways how the study of the "table" in Judaism benefits from placing it in the context of the Hellenistic meal paradigm. Noting points of commonality between rabbinic and Hellenistic meals may be interesting in and of itself, but the goal, as I see it, is to understand better what the framers of Jewish meals were trying to accomplish for the participants and the community.

The Passover seder, which is presented in great detail in the Tosefta, the Mishnah, and the two Talmuds, will be the main focus of this essay. It is a meal that has deep significance for both Judaism and Christianity.

Since the Tosefta, a rabbinic collection from the same time period as the Mishnah (first and second centuries CE) preserves much pre-Mishnaic material, the seder it describes is likely to be in its early stages of development.[2] After the destruction of the second Temple in 70 CE, when it was no longer possible to

offer a paschal sacrifice, it became necessary to devise a way of celebrating Passover at home. This project, undertaken by rabbis, took several hundred years. Close readings of their writings reveal developments over time.

The key elements of the Toseftan seder are a meal, four cups of wine, and the recitation of Hallel (Psalms 113–118). There is no mention of telling the story of the Exodus, although Psalm 114 thanks God for taking the Israelites out of Egypt. The seder that the Mishnah describes asks questions about the meal's rituals, tells the story of the Exodus, explains the special foods on the table, and so on. I have therefore concluded that the Mishnah's seder represents a later stage of development, a time when additional rituals had been incorporated into the celebratory meal of the Tosefta. Such evolution over time makes sense.

The rabbis who developed the "table-fellowship" seder lived in the land of Israel, and were undoubtedly influenced by the practices of Hellenistic banquets or symposia. Reading the fully developed seder through the paradigm of Hellenistic meals, therefore, is likely to yield significant results. That is, when the seder is viewed through the lens of contemporaneous social and cultural meals behavior, it becomes possible to understand more broadly and deeply what the rabbis who instituted the seder practices had in mind. The ten Theses of chapter 1 provide entrée into this cultural analysis. Whenever relevant, I will examine the seder from the perspective of these ten statements.

Poor Invited to Seder

The opening paragraph of Mishnah Pesahim 10, the chapter that describes the Passover seder in detail, says that "even the poorest Israelite should recline at the Passover seder and be served no fewer than four cups of wine. . . ."[3] The clear implication is that not just those who are accustomed to recline at banquets should do so on Passover night, but even those who are generally too poor and rushed to attend a lavish banquet, with its many courses and postprandial conversation, are mandated to attend one on Passover. Hal Taussig speaks of equality and

social stratification as two conflicting themes of the Hellenistic meal.[4] By requiring such a grand gesture to the poor, the rabbis seem to be thinking in terms of *erasing* social stratification for several hours, but, at the same time, *calling attention* to it, thereby "ritually reproducing the tension of these two values in the society at large."[5] Inviting in the poor is also an instance of the Greek tradition of *xenia*, extending hospitality to a foreigner or stranger.[6] Reading this Mishnah through the lens of Hellenistic banquet culture shows that the Passover seder does not just invite the poor in for a night of luxury but makes a statement about social justice as well.

Reclining

The first mishnah of Mishnah Pesahim 10 also states that all Jews, or rather all male Jews, are required to recline at the seder. In the Tosefta and Mishnah, the term for reclining, *le-hasaiv v*, refers to the Hellenistic custom of free men dining in a recumbent position.[7] However, the Yerushalmi passage on reclining differs somewhat in its interpretation of this term: "R. Levi said: Since slaves usually eat standing up but here [at the Passover seder] celebrants eat while reclining, *this informs [the public] that they [the celebrants] have emerged from slavery to freedom.* R. Simon in the name of R. Joshua b. Levi: the olive's bulk of mazah that a person is required to consume [at the seder], one must eat it while reclining." [8]

In this passage, R. Levi sees reclining as symbolizing the theme of the evening, the moment in the past when the Jewish God took His people from slavery to freedom. It is therefore likely that the seder is communicating a political message to those participating in it, that is, that freedom from foreign rule is the highest desideratum. As Taussig summarizes the work of Jonathan Z. Smith, "rituals generally call attention to a problematic event or pattern in the lives of a particular people."[9] And as Taussig asserts, " ritual is not so much a thing in itself, but a way human groups approach problematic realities of their lives."[10] The message of the seder in these terms is: today we are slaves to Rome, tomorrow we will be free.[11]

Drinking Wine at the Seder

Another insight gained from reading the seder in a Hellenistic context concerns the drinking of wine. Both the Mishnah and Tosefta stipulate that a person should drink four cups of wine at the seder, with the Mishnah associating a ritual with each of the four cups, such as reciting Grace over the third cup and the Hallel psalms over the fourth.[12] Hellenistic meals involved extensive drinking, which often resulted in drunkenness and sexually promiscuous behavior.[13] I therefore suggest that the Mishnah's specification of *four* cups is a response to that reality. If so, the Mishnah is saying, "drink four cups and *no more.* No drunken revelry is allowed." However, the Mishnah does say, later in the chapter, that a person may drink additional wine between the first and second cups and between the second and third, that is, with the appetizers or during the meal.[14] But, the Mishnah continues, once the meal is over and psalms of praise are being sung, no more drinking is allowed. The Mishnah is thus differentiating the seder from a Hellenistic banquet, but does not separate it entirely, since the Mishnah still permits additional cups of wine, beyond the four, to be drunk. Baruch Bokser makes similar points, although he does not see the symposium as the basis of the seder.[15]

Even the prescribed discussion of the Exodus at the seder, which is now called the *haggadah* (literally, the telling), takes on new meaning when examined against the Hellenistic banquet. As D. Smith says, "Topics were to be of a light and entertaining character such as was appropriate for those who were drinking, but they were nevertheless to be sufficiently serious that philosophical minds could be properly exercised."[16] In a similar vein, Mishnah Pesashim 10:4 states that the seder discussion should focus on the Exodus from Egypt, the subject of the verses at Deuteronomy 26:5–10. Mention was also to be made of key food items—the paschal lamb, mazah, and maror—and their symbolic meanings.[17] Such deliberation fits both categories, heavy and light, probably on purpose.

Women and the Seder

Another point of commonality and also difference is the presence and participation of women. There is much scholarly discussion

of whether or not women were present at Hellenistic banquets. The visuals in both Smith and Taussig suggest that ordinary women could attend, if not Greek then Hellenistic meals.[18] Taussig comments that in the Hellenistic period women were often found sitting at the feet of reclining men.[19] From there they could take part in the conversation and the meal. This means, he goes on to say, that the moorings of patriarchy were slightly loosened during the meal. Or, in Pierre Bourdieu's terms employed by Taussig, "It was a brief challenge to the *habitus* to allow the possibility of the *habitus* itself to shift slightly."[20] There is no mention in rabbinic literature of either flute girls or courtesans at the seder. Arguments from silence are not strong, but the absence of these kinds of women at the literary seder, when read against their presence at Hellenistic meals, again points to the social and religious agenda of the rabbis.

To find out if ordinary women, such as close female relatives, were at the Passover seder, we turn to the key statement on this matter in the Bavli, a later Babylonian rabbinic collection commenting on the Mishnah (fifth and sixth centuries CE): "A wife [dining] (*ezel*) with her husband [21] is exempt from reclining, unless she is aristocratic, in which case she is required to recline."[22] The phrase "*le-hasaiv ezel* X" means to dine/recline with X, where X is the host. The question is, does the phrase "a woman dining with her husband," which does locate her at the seder, also place her at her husband's seder "table"? Since the next statement is formulated in the same terms, that is, that "a son dining with (*ezel*) his father is required to recline," and since he is also required to ask his father "seder questions," the impression is created that both the son and the mother are at the same table as the husband and father.[23]

Strengthening this conclusion is the very next passage, a question: "Is a student dining with his teacher/rabbi required to recline?" Does he honor his teacher by sitting up straight or does he recline to fulfill the Mishnah's requirement? A rabbi named Abaye answers the question in the affirmative, saying that at the home of his teacher, Rabbah, the students used to recline by leaning on each other's knees. But when they arrived at the home of R. Yosef, another teacher, he said to them, "no need for you to recline; the fear of your teacher is like the fear of

Heaven," which means that reclining in the presence of a superior is disrespectful. It is therefore rather clear that the phrase "a student dining with his teacher" means a student at the teacher's seder table. If a student reclined elsewhere, it would not be seen as an affront to his teacher. I thus conclude that the wife, son, and student are all present at the seder table of the husband, father, and teacher.

A second conclusion is that the term "reclining" has again changed in meaning. The first change was assimilating the symbolism of "from slavery to freedom." We now see another change, or perhaps reversion. In the Bavli, "reclining" is understood as an assertion of social equality vis-à-vis one's superiors and hence frowned upon for social subordinates like wives and students. These shifts only become evident when one reads the rabbinic term "reclining" in the context of its Hellenistic meal setting. Note, surprisingly, that the Bavli's limitations on reclining are a far cry from the Mishnah's inclusive statement on reclining.[24] Is it possible that reclining was no longer a standard way of dining in Babylonia and hence was being understood differently and reduced in scope? The Babylonian conclusion seems to be that a woman does have a place at the seder table but, unlike the men in attendance who recline, a woman is expected to sit up straight in deference to her husband.

Further proof that women attended the seder is the tannaitic statement (dating to the time of the Tosefta and Mishnah, *but* appearing in the Talmud), that if a son is wise, he asks his father, the symposiarch, the seder questions. If he is not wise, the wife asks the seder questions of her husband.[25] I don't know if a woman ever asked her husband the seder questions—this is a prescriptive, not a descriptive statement—but the clear assumption of this tannaitic text, as it appears in the Bavli, is that a woman is at the seder table with her husband. We find a similar version of this tannaitic statement in the Erfurt ms. of Tosefta Pesahim 10:11, where the word "his house" (*beito*) means his wife.[26] The passage indicates that a head of household should discuss the laws of Passover with his student or wife or even, if all else fails, by himself. Moreover, since R Joshua b Levi, a slightly later rabbi, obligates a woman, too, to drink four cups

of wine on Passover night, this surely means that he presupposes her attendance at a seder,[27] as do other earlier references to her eating the paschal lamb. For example, the Mishnah says that a newly married woman, apparently out of embarrassment or shyness, may turn her face away from the *havurah* (table fellowship) of her husband's family when eating the paschal lamb with them.[28]

Statements like these, even though prescriptive, make it clear that rabbis expected women to partake of the paschal offering in Temple times and of the Passover meal in the post-Temple tannaitic period. The very next Mishnah examines a hypothetical case in which both a woman's father and her husband count her in their table fellowship for eating the paschal meal.[29] The Mishnah's question is, which fellowship should she join? This passage, and many others, assume a woman's presence at the Passover meal.[30]

Weddings

Let us now turn to rabbinic texts on weddings, because weddings also involve meals. Many Talmudic anecdotes begin, "R. So-and-so made a wedding feast, a *mishteh*, i.e., a drinking party, for his son." Such a locution makes it clear that the groom's family, not the bride's, hosts the wedding meals. At one wedding meal, the Talmud reports, the rabbi-host poured (or mixed) wine for junior colleagues who were his guests. Some of them rose for him when he poured the wine, while others remained seated. The host grew angry with those who did not rise.[31] This anecdote fits well with the ranking proclivities of Hellenistic hosts who determined seating arrangements based on the social status of the guests. The difference is that here the host, and not a servant, pours wine for the guests.[32]

Another anecdote, cited by Susan Marks, relates that Mar, the son of Ravina, made a wedding feast, a *hillula*, for his son.[33] He noticed that his rabbi-guests "*qabadhei tuva*," a somewhat opaque phrase that seems to connote too much merrymaking.[34] Maybe it implies bawdy behavior, maybe not. The passage goes on to relate that, "He, the host, brought a glass cup worth 400 zuz[!] and smashed it in front of them. They calmed down

(*a'atzivu*)." The text continues with another similar story: "R. Ashi made a wedding party for his son, saw that the rabbi-guests were going overboard in their merrymaking, and took a cup made of white glass, broke it in front of them and they calmed down."[35] Of course, breaking a glass is standard practice in the ancient world as a means of scaring away demons. But the story gives this custom new meaning, that is, it is a warning to Jews to contain their merriment at weddings. That is, against the Hellenistic background of wild weddings, the rabbis of the Babylonian Talmud tell didactic tales to condemn over-the-top behavior, which was likely to have been common among Jews too.[36] As Taussig asserts, "Texts regularly portrayed meals in order to make ideological points, support and subvert existing values and institutions. . . . "[37] In this case, excessive drinking that results in excessive merrymaking is strongly derided. Bokser notes that Christian writers also warned their audiences about the excesses of the Hellenistic banquet.[38] Philo, too, described Hellenistic banquets in horrific terms.[39]

It is quite remarkable that the first mishnah of the first chapter of the first tractate, Mishnah Berachot, of the Talmud, includes a wedding story that is subversive in its own way.[40] Several tannaim debate the *terminus ad quem* for reciting the evening Shema Yisrael, which is a confession or affirmation of faith. R. Eliezer says that it may be recited until the end of the first watch, roughly 10 p.m. The Sages say, "until midnight." Rabban Gamliel opines, "until the rise of the morning star," that is, one may recite the evening Shema all night long. The mishnah goes on to relate that Rabban Gamliel's sons once came home past midnight from a drinking party, a *mishteh*, most likely a wedding, and said to their father, we have not yet recited the Shema (*lo qarinu et Shema*). Their implied message seems to be: we know we have done wrong, we were having a good time drinking, we decided not to stop partying and recite the Shema, and we are not particularly sorry about that. Rabban Gamliel catches them by surprise, saying that although they probably thought that midnight was the latest time for Shema recitation, one may actually recite it until the early morning. If so, they can still meet the deadline. I will go out on a limb and suggest that Rabban Gamliel produced this ruling on the

spot, to keep his sons from transgressing. In other words, the anecdote gave rise to the ruling that immediately precedes it, thereby giving the ruling more "punch." [41]

Reading this story against the Hellenistic meal paradigm shows that the young men are behaving like good Romans, while their father, a prominent rabbi and political leader, wants them to behave like rabbinic Jews. So what we see here, *at the very beginning of the Mishnah*, is an instance of rabbis against "Rome." Or, one might say, rabbis accommodating themselves to "Rome."[42]

Women and Torah at the Table

The ninth Thesis statement suggests that rabbinic meals have a civilizing function, and the eighth claims a shift in emphasis from food preparation to table talk. These are particularly important developments for women, who are the subject of the sixth Thesis statement. It states that there may be a difference between how women are portrayed idealistically in connection with meals and the actual facts of their participation. Examining rabbinic texts on women and table talk will shed light on this contested matter.

Talmudic sources make it clear that men discussed Torah in the study house with other men, not women. No female rabbis appear in rabbinic literature. A number of prescriptive materials go so far as to suggest that women should not learn Torah at all, certainly not in the study house.[43] But the anecdotal materials, the highly edited short reports of actual behavior, tell a different story.[44] They make two important points. The first is that study sessions could take place not just in the study house but in many other places as well, such as the rabbi's courtyard, a rented room in someone's home, in the rabbi's so-called living room, and certainly at his table.[45] This phenomenon is reminiscent of the early churches that would meet in private homes.[46] The second point is that once we realize that the venues for Torah study are many and varied, we begin to notice that women in rabbinic families engaged in discussion of Jewish law with men, usually their male relatives, in home settings and at the table. Those scholars who look only at the prescriptive rulings, ignoring the

short anecdotes, and who take the conventional approach to the study house, will not notice this significant phenomenon.

An example of a woman engaging in Torah talk at the table: when a guest at a Sabbath meal examined a cup of wine by the light of the Sabbath lamp, apparently to see whether or not it was clean, R. Assi's wife said to her husband, "but the Master (i.e., you) does not allow this!"[47] We can conclude from her remark that she was present at the meal, in one capacity or another,[48] and that she knew the halakhah, or rule, about not examining a cup by the light of the Sabbath lamp. Given that the rule was still under discussion, she could not have learned it from her mother when growing up. Rather, it is likely that her husband communicated his view on the matter to her. This woman, who feels comfortable criticizing a guest's behavior to her husband, is then told by him that the guest is merely following his own teacher's rulings and that he may do so in their home, even if it conflicts with their own practice. For our discussion, the message of this story is that women are present at meals, that discussion of Jewish law is happening at the table, and that women knowledgeably participate in it.

Maintaining or Establishing Patriarchy?

I conclude with a question that arose from reading these other explorations of meals. What leads to what? Can one say that by means of rabbinic rulings on meals, such as that women are exempt from eating meals in the *sukkah* (booth) on the festival of Sukkot,[49] that rabbis are seeking to *establish* a hierarchical society, that is, one in which only men have knowledge and hence power? Or can one only say that these rules merely *reflect* the social and cultural values and practices of the men who framed them?

When rabbis legislate that women are exempt from positive time-bound mizvot, like reciting the Shema or donning tefillin, there is little basis on which to claim that they are seeking to establish a social order that does not already exist. On the contrary, there is every reason to think, based on close readings of rabbinic texts, that the configuration of the society in which the rabbis lived was already patriarchal, as it was in the biblical

period and later, and that via their rulings they left that patriarchy in place. There is no denying that rabbinic rulings place men at the center of society, for example, as judges and scholars and heads of household, and women at the periphery. How can one therefore say with any degree of certainty that when rabbis legislate in ways that make women second-class citizens, unable, for instance, to take men in marriage or to divorce them, that the rabbis are seeking to *establish* a new social order for the future? Keeping a patriarchy in place is all that I note in these texts.

We can see, however, that on occasion rabbis attempted to create a new social order. When they suggest that a woman recite Grace for her husband,[50] or that she read the book of Esther on Purim for the public,[51] they are breaking out of patriarchy. The same claim can be made regarding their stipulation that a woman eat mazah and bitter herbs at the Passover seder[52] and light the Hanukkah lamp for the household.[53] Such rulings pull a woman into the mainstream of Jewish practice, which is not where she was before, halakhically speaking.[54] So the attitudes of the rabbis seem to be shifting in favor of imposing more religious obligations on women and opening up more ritual opportunities to them.[55] These changes allow the habitus, in Bourdieu's terms, to shift slightly, or, in Taussig's terms, they loosen the moorings of patriarchy.

General Observations

These many examples, drawn from the Passover seder and other meals, show the rewards of reading rabbinic texts through the lens of Hellenistic meal practice. Finding parallel behaviors is interesting. But the leap forward is when Hellenistic practices impel us to read rabbinic texts differently from before, in a more nuanced manner. This chapter has argued that the rabbis living in the land of Israel in a Hellenistic culture allowed that culture to affect their thinking about Jewish meals.

The Passover seder that the rabbis developed both resisted acculturation and, at the same time, embraced it. The rabbis called attention to economic inequality, even as they stipulated a lavish seder banquet. They required drinking four cups of wine

at the seder, even as they inveighed against drunkenness. They took initial steps to limit patriarchy, even as they, in general, tolerated it. At heart, they created meals that reminded participants of the core Jewish narrative—God's taking the Israelites from slavery to freedom—and the weighty moral obligations that flow from that theme.[56] Reading the rabbis in the context of the ten thesis statements uncovered these new truths.

Notes

1. See Brumberg-Kraus, Marks, and Rosenblum, chapter 1, for discussion of the Ten Thesis statements. See the Appendix of chapter 1 for a full listing of the the Ten Theses.
2. See my *Rereading the Mishnah,* 50–64. See also an earlier version of this chapter, "How Old Is the Haggadah?," 5–18.
3. *m. Pes* 10:1.
4. Hal Taussig, *In the Beginning Was the Meal: Social Experimentation and Early Christian Identity.* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2009), 69. In *From Symposium to Eucharist* (150), Dennis E. Smith comments that issues of social justice are consistently addressed at the Hellenistic banquet.
5. Taussig, *In the Beginning Was the Meal,* 70.
6. Taussig, *In the Beginning Was the Meal,* 30.
7. *t. Ber* 5:5 and elsewhere.
8. *y. Pes* 10:1, 37b.
9. Taussig, *In the Beginning Was the Meal,* 60, citing J. Z. Smith.
10. Taussig, *In the Beginning Was the Meal,* 66.
11. Cf. *b. Meg* 14a, where Rava says that on Passover we can recite Hallel, songs of praise to God, "because we are no longer slaves to Pharoah; but here [i.e., on Purim, we cannot recite Hallel] because we are still slaves to Ahaseurus (the Persian king)."
12. See *m. Pes* 10:1 and *t. Pes* 10:1. In like manner, Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist* (176), sees early Christian communal meals as a form of liturgy.
13. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist: The Banquet in the Early Christian World* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), 36–37.
14. *m. Pes* 10:7.
15. Baruch M. Bokser, *The Origins of the Passover Seder*: The Passover Rite and Early Rabbinic Judaism (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 55: "...the symposia did not provide the impetus of the development of the Passover seder...."

16. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 52.
17. *m. Pes* 10:5
18. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 16–17; Taussig, *In the Beginning Was the Meal*, 24–5.
19. Taussig, *In the Beginning Was the Meal*, 70.
20. Taussig, *In the Beginning Was the Meal*, 71
21. To "recline at" (*m'subin ezel*) means to "dine with." See *t. Ber* 5:3, "guests who were dining/reclining with their host. . . . " I am therefore suggesting that the words *"ishah ezel* ba'alah. . . . hasaivah," refer to a woman dining with her husband in their own home. The reason there is no verb in the opening phrase is that if the term "reclining" is inserted, the question of whether or not she is required to recline cannot be asked. The question one might still raise is, does the phrase "to dine with" imply that she reclines at the same table as her husband or might it mean in the same space but not at the same table? For the purposes of this inquiry, either option meets our needs.
22. *b. Pes* 108a. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist* (43), comments that in the first century CE respectable women of the Roman aristocracy attended banquets and reclined at them. See his additional comments that women and children who were present at a Greek banquet had to sit and not recline. This indicated their secondary social status. The Romans, however, began to allow women to recline as full participants at a banquet (208).
23. R Yosi asked R Simon: Even a slave in the presence of his master [should recline]? Even a wife in the presence of her husband [should recline]? He said to him: Rabbi, I only know what I heard [and have not heard answers to these questions] (*y. Pes* 10:1, 37b). The possibility is raised in this passage that a slave might sit at the same table as his master.
24. *m. Pes* 10:1 requires all Jews to recline, as noted earlier.
25. *b. Pes* 116a
26. So reads the text of the Erfurt ms; The Vienna ms. reads somewhat differently, saying that a man is obligated to engage with the laws of Passover the whole night with either his son, himself, or his student. The expression "his wife" in the Erfurt ms. has been replaced by "himself" in the Vienna ms., and the expression "himself" in the Erfurt ms. has been replaced by "his son" in the Vienna ms.
27. *b. Pes* 108a.
28. *m. Pes* 7.13.
29. *m. Pes* 8.1.
30. I disagree with Rosenblum, *Food and Identity* (206), who holds that one cannot reach a solid conclusion about the presence or

absence of women from the tannaitic table. It seems to me that rabbinic texts clearly place women at the seder table.

31. *b. Kid* 32b.
32. Taussig, *In the Beginning Was the Meal,* 27. Smith *From Symposium to Eucharist* (156) compares Qumran documents to the rules of Greco-Roman clubs, all of which pay close attention to ranking by social status.
33. *b. Ber* 30b-31a, discussed in Susan Marks, *First Came Marriage: The Rabbinic Appropriation of Early Jewish Wedding Ritual* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2013), 168–169.
34. The root B.D.H means "to cheer up, to make laugh" [Marcus Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumin, The Talmuc Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* (New York: W. Drugulin, Oriental Printer, 1903), 139; Michael Sokoloff, *A Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic* (The John Hopkins University Press, 2003), 185, to be cheerful]. *Tuva* means "much."
35. *b. Ber* 31a.
36. Note that Babylonian rabbis seem to know of Hellenistic banquet customs. R. Kalmin, *Jewish Babylonia—between Perisa and Roman Palestine: Decoding the Literary Record* (New York: Oxford Press, 2006), 173–187, argues that in the mid-third-century CE, large-scale population shifts led many Jews to move from Israel to Babylonia. They brought their teachings with them. The literary effects of this shift were not felt until the middle of the fourth century CE.
37. Taussig, *In the Beginning Was the Meal,* 56.
38. Bokser, *The Origins of the Seder,* 65–66.
39. *On the Contemplative Life*, nos. 40–63, as cited in Bokser, *The Origins of the Seder*, 56–57. See discussions of this text in chapters 6–10 of the present volume.
40. *m. Ber* 1.1
41. Moshe Simon-Shoshan, *Stories of the Law: Narrative Discourse and the Construction of Authority in the Mishnah* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 1–2.
42. This could be understood as another instance of Taussig's phenomenon of conflicting themes. The father calls attention to the sons' Roman behavior, while, at the same time, placing it into a rabbinic context.
43. For instance, *b. Kid* 29b states that one should teach Torah to one's sons but not one's daughters.
44. For a discussion of whether these anecdotes are fabrications or descriptions of events that actually took place, see my article, Judith Hauptman "A New View of Women and Torah Study in the Talmudic Period," *JSIJ* 9 (2010): 249–292.

45. See Hezser, *The Social Structure of the Rabbinic Movement in Roman Palestine* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997), 196ff, who points out that many Torah discussions took place at the master rabbi's table, in his courtyard, in a rented room, on the road, at the bathhouse, and so on.
46. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 177–178. He notes that a householder who hosted a church meeting in his home would act according to the cultural norm of hospitality and provide a meal for his guests. The meetings likely took place in a dining room, often built large for this very purpose.
47. *b. Shab* 12a.
48. Was she just serving drinks and a meal to the two men but not sitting with them? Or was she actually sitting at the table with them? I do not know but I can say that her exchange with her husband certainly suggests that she did not just serve and leave.
49. *m. Suk* 2:8.
50. *t. Ber* 5:17; *b. Ber* 20b.
51. *b. Arak* 3a.
52. *t. Pes* 2:22; *b. Pes* 91b.
53. *b. Shabb* 23a.
54. Taussig, *In the Beginning Was the Meal* (161–162, 170), says that communal meals enabled early Christians to address significant social issues of their day, including gender
55. Taussig says that women made great strides in this period; *In the Beginning Was the Meal,* 157–162. See also my Hauptman, *Rereading the Rabbis: A Woman's Voice* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998), 221–244.
56. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist* (150) writes: Meals define boundaries and group identity; meals functioned to define identity within Judaism (171); community meals had an unparalleled power to define social boundaries and create social bonding (184). Taussig, *In the Beginning Was the Meal* (174), comments: oft-disputed relationships between Jew and Greek, slave and free, and male and female, can now be seen much clearer through the meal lens.

CHAPTER 3

Food and Identity in Early Rabbinic Judaism

Jordan D. Rosenblum

In a recent book titled *Eating Animals*, author Jonathan Safran Foer reflects on the ethics of meat-eating.[1] At one point, he comments: "There are thousands of foods on the planet, and explaining why we eat the relatively small selection we do requires some words. We need to explain that the parsley on the plate is for decoration, that pasta is not a 'breakfast food,' why we eat wings but not eyes, cows but not dogs. Stories establish narratives, and stories establish rules."[2] As a scholar of rabbinic Judaism, I often confront ancient texts that provide complex narratives and rules. Looking behind such narratives and rules, I encounter the kind of stories that concern Safran Foer. In this essay, I discuss how these stories about food practices in early rabbinic, or tannaitic, literature work together to establish narratives and rules that help to construct a distinct identity.

Before proceeding, I would like to clarify what I mean by the term "identity." We too often throw around this term in a manner analogous to the term "pornography," in that we claim to know it when we see it. I understand "identity" to be defined by practices.[3] Practices are bundled sets of social activities that allow one to signal overtly his or her perceived relationship to a given identity. For example, I might write in a text that I am an opera fan. Such a claim might be used to affect an air of sophistication in order to impress others. Despite this assertion, I do

not buy opera recordings, never visit an opera house, never read opera scores, etc. In short, actions speak louder than words.[4] By focusing on practices, I am attempting to close the gap between texts and their lived contexts, between words and actions; or, in Theodore Schatzki's terminology, it allows me to consider both "sayings" and "doings."[5] Practices encompass the words one utters and inscribes about his/her actions ("sayings"/professing a love for opera), and the actual actions themselves ("doings"/ engaging in opera-related activities) in the construction of self- and group identification. As such, I understand texts to prescribe practices, and it is these practices that index identity.

Food and commensality are important loci for discussion about identity practices. Humans must consume calories on a regular basis, or place their very survival in peril. As a mundane activity, ingestion serves as an important means of identity negotiation. Since all humans must eat regularly, food practices thus allow regular opportunities to distinguish one group from another. Concomitant with these table practices are the stories that groups tell about them. In this essay, I explore a few select stories of the early rabbis, the Tannaim. It should be noted that, while important, food is not the only mechanism deployed by the Tannaim to use practices in order to establish their nascent identity (other practices include liturgical, calendrical, economic, etc.). Therefore, tannaitic stories told about food practices are a component of a larger narrative and set of rules that, when taken together, serve to construct early rabbinic identity.

We are now prepared to enter the tannaitic kitchen. Our entrepôt is through a text that is part of a larger discussion concerning the extent to which a Jew and a Gentile may interact in the kitchen.[6] One might have thought that the Tannaim would have barred all such interreligious kitchen encounters. This is not the case. Rather, according to Tosefta *Avodah Zarah* 4:11:[7]

> [A] A loaf of bread that a Gentile baked without Jewish supervision, and cheese that a Gentile curdled without Jewish supervision, [both] are prohibited.
>
> [B] [But] a loaf of bread that a Jew baked, even though the Gentile kneaded [the dough], and cheese that a Jew curdled, even though the Gentile works it—behold, this is permitted.

The Tannaim are answering a practical question here: To what extent can a non-Jew participate in the cooking process and still have the resulting food be considered kosher? Immediately, we see that food follows the status of its assumed preparer.[8] This text does not suggest that the recipe or ingredient list differs in either case. What does differ, however, is that a Jew participates in the activities that actually take place in the kitchen.

From this story, and many like it, I understand the Tannaim to articulate a general principle, which I call the Chef/Sous-Chef Principle.[9] I take these terms from the modern kitchen, in which the same tension can be found. On the one hand, the sous-chef is involved with a variety of preparatory work, while the chef is responsible for the final product. On the other hand, the work of the sous-chef often looks rather similar to that of the chef. Perhaps what distinguishes the modern chef from the sous-chef is the fact that the chef supervises the entire kitchen, sometimes—especially in the case of an executive chef—from afar. However, to reiterate a point I just made, the chef is *responsible* for the final product of his or her kitchen.[10]

So how does this nomenclature help us to understand the text at hand? When the Gentile is baking bread or making cheese alone in a kitchen, he or she is serving as the role of the chef. As such, the food is not considered by the Tannaim to be valid for ingestion by a Jew. If a Jew participates in the kitchen activities, then the status of the food produced therein has the potential to change. Of course, as is also the case with energy, that potential is not always realized. If a Jew is present in the kitchen, but playing the role of a sous-chef, then a Gentile is the chef and the food would not be permitted. But, so long as the Jew plays the role of the chef, then the food is valid for ingestion by a Jew. In this case, the definition of a chef seems to be the one who bakes the dough or curdles the cheese. It does not matter that a Gentile kneads the dough or collects the cheese curds and forms them into cheese. They have served the role of a sous-chef and, so long as there is a Jewish chef in the kitchen, the end product is considered valid for Jewish ingestion by the Tannaim. In sum, the identity of the food follows the identity of its chef, all of which are based on a set of practices that occur both in and out of the kitchen.

I would like to highlight two additional points relevant for this text. First, Jews and non-Jews are allowed to interact in the rabbinic kitchen. Rather than issuing a blanket prohibition preventing such an encounter, the Tannaim develop the chef/sous-chef principle. In doing so, the Tannaim provide a leniency due to practical, economic, and perhaps even social reasons.[11] Although this is a leniency, it is a leniency with limitations: Jewish participation is both required and regulated. Second, the definition of what constitutes the essential kitchen action of the chef is dependent on the foodstuff. For example, while the kneading of the dough and the molding of the cheese are structurally and functionally comparable, a different set of actions applies when, for example, meat is being prepared.[12] Both of these observations highlight how the Tannaim regulate the kitchen in a somewhat flexible manner and, in doing so, construct a fluid identity.[13] The rules of the tannaitic kitchen thus allow for the messy realities of life.

However, the interaction of food and identity does not end when the food leaves the kitchen. And just as non-Jews are encountered in the rabbinic kitchen, they are also found in the world in general. And since everyone needs to eat, the rabbis had to decide to what extent one could or should engage in commensality with a non-Jew. We have learned that Jews may share a kitchen with non-Jews, but may they share a table with those whose practices serve to identify them as the Other? In answering these questions concerning acceptable rabbinic food practices, we will read two very interesting and provocative stories about celebrating with Gentiles, particularly at their weddings and over alcohol with women.

As we just discussed, according to the Tannaim, the status of the food follows the status of its preparer. Hence, "Jewish" food requires a Jewish chef. However, an unresolved question remains: Does the status of those around the table affect the status of the food served on that table? In other words, does kosher food require kosher guests? In Tosefta *Avodah Zarah* 4:6, we find one answer to this question:[14]

> [A] R. Shimon ben Elazar says: "Jews [literally: Israelites] outside of the Land [of Israel] are idolaters."

> [B] How so?
>
> [C] A non-Jew makes a [wedding] banquet for his son and goes and invites all of the Jews who live in his town.
>
> [D] Even if they eat and drink [only] their own [food and wine] and their own servant stands and serves them, they are idolaters, as it is said: "And he will invite you and you will eat from his sacrifice." [Exodus 34:15]

Though the food is clearly kosher, the banquet at which it is consumed is not. *The concern here is commensal in nature, and not culinary*, that is *with whom* you eat, and not *what* you eat.

While the first text that we examined allowed Jews and non-Jews to share a kitchen, this text is establishing stricter boundaries. Certain commensal interactions are off limits. The fact that this scenario involves a wedding banquet is probably a quite significant factor in this decision. A wedding is a public ceremony in which social relations and order are affirmed and reaffirmed; it is a practice that serves to (re)establish social networks and improve their density.[15] Thus, this is no average social event; the implications of the union have tangible social consequences.[16] This is further compounded by the fact that the Hebrew Bible does not consistently prohibit intermarriage. Thus, the Tannaim perceive a greater need to distance a rabbinic Jew from any marriage banquet involving non-Jews. While our first text discussed the product of the kitchen, our second text problematizes the product of a social encounter. We have moved from dinner to diner: from that which is consumed to the one consuming.

This concern, however, is even more explicit in the next text that we will examine. In *Sifre Numbers* 131, we read:

> [A] She [a Moabite woman] would say to him [an Israelite man]: "Would you like to drink [some] wine?"
>
> [B] He would drink and the wine would burn within him and he would say to her: "Listen to me [i.e., have intercourse with me]!"
>
> [C] She would take out an image of Pe'or from under her bra and say to him: "Rabbi, is it your desire that I listen to you? [If so, then] bow to this!"[17]

This fascinating text makes explicit what is only tacit in several other texts. Though there is much to discuss in regard to this rich text, I will address three key points.

First, this text is, at heart, a biblical exegesis. It is attempting to explain a passage in Exodus 34:15–17, part of which we encountered previously in Tosefta *Avodah Zarah* 4:6 as a biblical proof text for not attending the wedding banquet of a non-Jew. Exodus 34:15–17 states:

> [15] Lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land and they will whore after their gods and sacrifice to their gods and he will invite you and you will eat from his sacrifice.
>
> [16] And you will take [wives] from amongst their daughters for your sons, their daughters will whore after their gods and will make your sons whore after their gods.
>
> [17] As for molten gods, you shall not make them for yourselves.

According to the Tannaim, if you eat with an idolater, you will meet his daughter; if you meet his daughter, you will drink with her; if you drink with her, you will want to have sex with her; if you want to have sex with her, you will be willing to bow down to the idol that she conveniently keeps hidden in her bra for just such occasions. Thus, to eat with such a woman is one step down the slippery slope to idolatry. There is also a play here on the biblical notion of “whoring,” wherein the desire for other gods is understood as cheating on God, with whom one should be in a monogamous theological relationship.[18] This is also why I prefer to translate this verb as “whore” and not the more innocuous “lust” or “prostitute.” I wish to convey the revulsion that the text intends.

Second, the deity invoked by the Tannaim, Ba‘al Pe‘or, is a not a contemporary god, but rather a biblical deity.[19] This means that the audience might not be immediately familiar with Ba‘al Pe‘or in the way that it would with Aphrodite or Dionysus. Yet, this anachronism does not deter the Tannaim from making their larger point: namely, that sharing wine with an idolatrous woman could lead one down a slippery slope that culminates in idolatry. In neither this nor the previous text are the Tannaim being accomodationist. Rather, they are drawing

a line in the sand, a border at the table. There are some interactions allowed, but some are too fraught with danger to allow. And these are two such perilous meals.

Third, while the tone of this passage is clearly cautionary, I firmly believe that there is an intended sense of humor here. The fact that the Moabite woman has an idol in her bra is both a serious caution and a moment of levity. The audience is meant to laugh and to learn. After all, narratives that establish identity need not be dry and boring. Humor is thus used here as a (perhaps not so) subtle rhetorical technique to exert social pressure. The story is funny, but its application for lived practice is no laughing matter.

While this essay focuses on the Tannaim, in the space remaining I would like to briefly examine how the next group of rabbis, the Amoraim, continue to develop these concepts. Often, what was intimated, tacit, or alluded to in tannaitic texts is made explicit in amoraic literature. Such is the case in regard to the repercussions for indiscriminate table fellowship between Jewish men and non-Jewish women.

In a text famous among rabbinic foodies, Babylonian Talmud *Avodah Zarah* 31b states:

> [A] It was stated: Why did they prohibit the [non-wine] alcohol[20] of idolaters?
>
> [B] Rami bar Ḥama said [in the name of] R. Yitzḥak: Because of intermarriage. . . .[21]
>
> [C] For R. Pappa, they would bring it to the door [of the idolater's] tavern, and he would drink it [there].
>
> [D] For R. Aḥai, they would bring it to his house, and he would drink it [there].
>
> [E] Both of them [understood this prohibition to exist] because of intermarriage, [but] R. Aḥai made a greater buffer.

The prohibition against consuming Gentile wine does not begin with the Amoraim. Tannaitic texts had already declared this practice *verboten*. This prohibition was based on fears of consuming a beverage that had been libated to a Pagan deity. The rabbinic fear of libated wine, or *yeyn nesekh*, was such that the rabbis went to almost comical limits to prevent what they

seemed to assume was an obsessive-compulsive desire on the part of Gentiles to libate wine.[22] For example, according to Mishnah *Avodah Zarah* 5:5, wine in a closed jug is prohibited for Jewish consumption if a Gentile is left alone with it in a room for a length of time sufficient to open it, reseal it, and then allow the seal to dry.

However, this fear only applies to wine. As the rabbis are well aware of, wine is the only beverage suitable for Pagan worship. Therefore, to ban nonwine alcohol, *sheḥar*, on account of Pagan libation would not make sense. Logically, then, all nongrape intoxicants should be acceptable, even if prepared by, or left alone with, Gentiles. In fact, apple wine prepared by non-Jews is explicitly permitted by the Tannaim in Tosefta *Avodah Zarah* 4:12.

This left the Babylonian Amoraim in a proverbial pickle. In Palestine, the beverage of choice was wine; as such, the ban on Gentile wine kept a social distance between Jews and non-Jews. In Babylon, however, the drink of choice was beer, often made from barley or dates. Would the Amoraim allow this beverage to be consumed? Would they ban it? Or would they put limits on what kind and under what circumstances it can be consumed?

Like the Palestinian Tannaim before them, the Babylonian Amoraim realized the potential social ramifications of consuming alcohol in a social setting. Long before the age of JDate and Internet dating, they knew that a bar was a great place to meet women, or at least men who might introduce them to their daughters and/or sisters. While their Palestinian brethren could cite fears of Pagan libation to problematize Gentile wine, the Babylonian Amoraim had no such rationale for beer. They thus turn to a social explanation: Gentile beer is banned because it might lead to intermarriage. At this moment, the social historian in me must smile, because one cannot be accused of reading some complicated anthropological or sociological theory into this text. The Babylonian Talmud is quite clear: this ban is enacted due to a concern that it might lead to marital relations that the authors deem to be unacceptable. This point is further driven home by the tales of the two rabbis who follow the initial ruling. Rav Pappa, the more lenient rabbi, would drink beer without worry, as long as he was outside the tavern; Rav Aḥai, the more *maḥmir*, or stringent, rabbi, would wait until he got

home, and then drink beer without worry. In both cases, and in a direct analog to the tannaitic discussion about the wedding banquet for the son of a non-Jew, the concern here is commensal in nature and not culinary; drinking beer in a Gentile bar is not kosher, even though the beverage itself is.

As David Freidenreich has observed in regard to this text:

> If the underlying concern is that drinking beer in a gentile tavern might lead to fraternization with the gentile regulars and ultimately to sex with their daughters or with women who might be present, then the antisocial act of ordering "takeout" or home delivery of one's alcohol renders the beverage itself permitted for consumption. . . . These Sages employ scholastic reasoning to navigate conflicting practical concerns: fear of intercourse on the one hand and the desire for beer on the other.[23]

This is an important point that also applies to wine. In both their Palestinian and Babylonian contexts, the ancient rabbis chose not to outright ban beverages that they clearly had a desire to drink. In fact, they praise wine and beer for their many admirable qualities—from their health benefits, to their flavor, to their propensity for increasing festive joy. Instead, they find ways to regulate the perceived social ramifications of consuming these beverages.

Exploring the road not taken is important in our study of the role that food plays in rabbinic identity. While the rabbis could have banned all wine, on account of fears of Pagan libation, and all other alcohol, on account of fears of indiscriminate social mixing, they instead sought to reach a compromise. As we saw earlier in regard to the chef/sous-chef principle, they wanted to separate without being completely separate. They desired to drink wine or beer, as long as the wine was kosher and the beer was consumed in a kosher manner.

As I have mentioned on several occasions, there are both culinary and commensal concerns addressed in these corpora. Culinary concerns relate to that which one eats and commensal concerns relate to how and with whom one eats. For the rabbis, *kashrut* is about both dinner and diner. That which is consumed and the ones consuming it combine to create a kosher—or nonkosher—meal.

In modernity, a slogan concerning the intersection between food, ethics, health, business, and politics has arisen: "vote with your fork." The same sentiment—that one's food practices indicate that one is a stakeholder in a given system (and, concomitantly, signify the rejection of a potentially competing system)—applies to the ancient rabbis. Every time one prepares and ingests a meal, one is making a statement. For the rabbis, the practices surrounding the preparation and ingestion of foodstuffs are designed to assure that not only is the food kosher, but the dining table and the diners are as well. In adhering to these practices, Jews thus signal their self-identification as rabbinic Jews. They vote with their forks.

Notes

1. I would like to thank all of the members of the "Meals in the Greco-Roman World" group for their feedback on an earlier version of this paper, especially the editors of this volume, Susan Marks and Hal Taussig. I began to interact with this group as a graduate student and have appreciated their advice, friendship, collegiality, and commensality. I thank Israel Hass for his comments on the first draft of this paper. Finally, I thank the Wisconsin Alumni Research Foundation (WARF) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, which generously provided funds that aided in this research.
2. Safran Foer, *Eating Animals* (New York: Back Bay Books/Little, Brown and Co., 2010), 12.
3. My discussion of identity is heavily informed by Theodore R. Schatzki, *The Site of the Social: A Philosophical Account of the Constitution of Social Life and Change* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002), who himself is influenced by many theorists (including Pierre Bourdieu, Charles Taylor, and Michel Foucault), and is based off of my argument in Jordan D. Rosenblum, *Food and Identity in Early Rabbinic Judaism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 5–8. Much of this article summarizes points made in this book. Since writing the book, however, I have decided that some points need more nuance and have begun to explore further applications of these theories, which are reflected in the current essay.
4. A similar sentiment is uttered by Shammai in Mishnah *Avot* 1:15 (Albeck ed., 4:356): "say little and do much."

5. On Schatzki's use of these terms, see Schatzki, *Site of the Social*, 70–88.
6. Defining what constitutes a "Jew" in antiquity is as difficult as doing so for the modern category. Throughout, when I use the term "Jew," I refer to someone whom the Tannaim deem to be in accordance with rabbinic practice. When such a person deviates from proper rabbinic procedure, the rabbis debate how to handle (and, in fact, define) this person. For example, see Rosenblum, *Food and Identity in Early Rabbinic Judaism*, 154–161.
7. For Tosefta, see M. S. Zuckermandel, ed., *Tosefta: 'al pi kitve yad 'Erfurt u-Ṿinah: 'im mar'eh meḳomot ṿe-ḥilufe girsa'ot u-mafteḥot* (Yerushalayim: Sifre Ṿahrman, 1963), 466–467, unless otherwise indicated. In general, see Rosenblum, *Food and Identity in Early Rabbinic Judaism*, 83–89.
8. By "status," I mean the perceived state of one's identity, as constructed by his/her practices.
9. For a fuller discussion, see Rosenblum, *Food and Identity in Early Rabbinic Judaism*, 11–12, 83–89, 113–114, 119–121, 189, and *passim*.
10. On the role that the cognitive theory of agency plays in this model, see Daniel Ullucci and Jordan D. Rosenblum, "Qualifying Rabbinic Ritual Agents: Cognitive Science and the Early Rabbinic Kitchen," *Religious Competition in the Third Century C.E.: Jews, Christians, and the Greco-Roman World*, eds. N. P. DesRosiers, J. D. Rosenblum, and L. C. Vuong, forthcoming.
11. For another example of an economic leniency by the Tannaim, see Jordan Rosenblum, "Kosher Olive Oil in Antiquity Reconsidered," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 40, no. 3 (2009): 356–365.
12. On the relevant issues regarding meat, see Rosenblum, *Food and Identity in Early Rabbinic Judaism*, 76–81.
13. Again, this is an instance where the importance of practice for defining identity is useful in the kitchen. By allowing for different practices, the rabbis provide both for the realities of cooking and for the variable practices it requires. Under rabbinic supervision, Jews have their food in the literal pot and their identity in the proverbial pot.
14. On this and the next text, see Rosenblum, *Food and Identity, in Early Rabbinic Judaism* 91–101; Rosenblum, "From Their Bread to Their Bed."
15. In Network Theory, "density" refers to the amount of strong connections in a given network. A dense network is therefore one in which nodes are strongly tied to one another. Marriage is one

social means by which weak social ties are strengthened and, in doing so, a social network becomes denser.

16. On rabbinic marriage, see Marks, *First Came Marriage*.
17. Saul Horowitz, ed., *Sifrē ʻal sefer Bĕ-midbar wĕ-Sifrē Zuṭā. Corpus Tannaiticum. Veterum Doctorum Ad Pentateuchum Interpretationes Halachicas Continens* (Lipsiae: Gustav Fock, 1917), 171
18. This is not the only instance in which the rabbis make this association. For example, see Warren Zev Harvey, "The Pupil, the Harlot and the Fringe Benefits," *Prooftexts*, 6 no.3 (1986): 259–264
19. For scholarship on this issue, see the sources cited in Rosenblum, *Food and Identity in Early Rabbinic Judaism*, 95–96 n. 216.
20. This term can mean alcohol in general, but the context here clearly implies that the subject is alcohol other than wine. Sokoloff (Michael Sokoloff, *A Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic* (Baltimore, MD: The John Hopkins University Press, 2003), 1145–1146) states that this refers to "an alcoholic beverage not made from grapes"; Jastrow (Marcus., *A Dictionary of the Targumin, The Talmuc Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature*. New York: W. Drugulin, Oriental Printer, 1903; 1576) notes that this term especially refers to beer made from dates or barley.
21. The omitted passage discusses concerns related to leaving a beverage uncovered and, as a result, drinking snake venom (due to a thirsty snake drinking the beverage and, in the process, secreting snake venom). On this passage and general subject, see David M. Freidenreich, *Foreigners and Their Food: Constructing Otherness in Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Law* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 72–74; David C. Kraemer, *Jewish Eating and Identity through the Ages* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 69–72.
22. On this rabbinic topos, see Sacha Stern, "Compulsive Libationers: Non-Jews and Wine in Early Rabbinic Sources." *Journal of Jewish Studies*, 64, no.1 (2013) 19–44.
23. Freidenreich, *Foreigners*, 73. David was a fellow panelist when this paper was given at the Society of Biblical Literature in November 2011.

CHAPTER 4

In the Place of Libation: *Birkat Hamazon* Navigates New Ground*

Susan Marks

At the end of the eating portion of a Greek or Roman feast the host serves as *symposiarch*, or designates the guest with the most status to serve as *symposiarch*, to lead the wine libation.[1] This guest pours out some unmixed wine in honor of the chosen deity. Then all respond honoring the God's name.[2] This concludes the eating part of the meal, and makes way for more serious attention to drinking and discussion, at least for Greek symposia and some Roman drinking parties. Katherine Dunbabin emphasizes that Roman "ideology of commensality focused much more on the dinner."[3] Meanwhile, a well-known prescription reveals rabbinic consciousness of their neighbors' wine libations: "These things that belong to gentiles are forbidden, and it is forbidden to have any benefit at all from them: wine, or the vinegar of gentiles that at first was wine."[4] Because of this stated distancing, the similarities between the practices surrounding the rabbinic Grace after Meals [hereafter *birkat hamazon*] and Hellenistic and Roman libations have gone unremarked.

Nevertheless, parallels between Roman and other libations and *birkat hamazon* are truly remarkable.[5] Both enact the ongoing relationships of diners with each other and with the surrounding world. In particular, discussions of *birkat hamazon* emphasize key negotiations of hierarchy. In the following

narrative, younger disciples challenge the importance of recapitulating status within this blessing:[6]

> Judah son of Meremar and Mar son of R. Ashi and R. Aha from Difti took a meal with one another. Not one of their group was more deserving to bless than the other. They interpreted the Mishnah that "if three persons have eaten together it is their duty to invite," as applying only where one is superior. . . . Thus each said [the blessing] for himself. Thereupon they came before Meremar and he said to them: you have performed the obligation of blessing, but you have not performed the obligation of invitation [hereafter *zimmun*].[7]

Judah's father emphasizes that without reenacting their hierarchical relationships they have not fulfilled their obligations. As at many other contemporaneous meals the rabbinic practice of *birkat hamazon* demands a rehearsal of status vis-à-vis one another.

Birkat hamazon first and foremost constitutes the group that has dined: "Three who have dined as one are obligated to invite [one another to say the Grace after Meals together]," says the Mishnah (200 CE) in its tractate on blessings, Berakhot.[8] This chapter of Mishnah also asks "How do they invite?" The answer focuses on the nature of the group, for the number of people present determines the form of the invitation to say *birkat hamazon*. The Mishnah imagines a group of three, then ten, then ultimately ten thousand. In each instance, one utters a slightly different *zimmun* convening the group: "Let us bless; "Bless ye"; "Let us bless our God"; and so forth.[9] This small action performed by the group enacts the difference between individual eaters and a community of diners. It serves as a catalyst for the group constructing itself.

Rabbinic mealtime blessing involves blessings as book ends to dining: an opening blessing depending on what sort of food awaits (whether it is "fruit of the earth," "fruit of the tree" or bread, etc.).[10] If there is a blessing over bread constituting the eating as a "meal," then a closing blessing, *birkat hamazon*, is said over a cup of wine at the end of the meal, designated for that purpose.[11] The wine stands as *such* a critical part of *birkat*

hamazon that "if there is only one cup of wine, it is reserved for the purpose of *birkat hamazon*."[12] If we were to ask "why does it matter that the Jews used to recite *birkat hamazon* at the end of the meal in a fashion similar to that in which Romans offer libations?" the emphasis on the importance of this one particular vessel of wine provides our answer. This focus on a mealtime bowl of wine differs from the only other evidence for a contemporaneous Jewish libation, one not performed at the table.[13] *Birkat hamazon* and its connection to wine at a meal emerges as a blessing of the Jewish God in the kind of gathering and space where Roman diners continually invoked their own divinities. This nexus of people and acts proved too important in this culture for generations of rabbinic meal participants to ignore.

Moreover, as Judah's father Meramar makes clear to his son, without the group invitation, the *zimmun*, the group of diners has *not* fulfilled its obligation. The recitation of this blessing to God is inexorably linked to engagement to a world of other people at the meal and beyond. In examining this engagement enacted by *birkat hamazon*, I argue for recognizing that in helping rabbis navigate social space, this recitation of *birkat hamazon* stands at the very core of shaping the movement.

Recently, Hal Taussig argues that meal practices "are not incidental to the social dynamics of the Hellenistic era but rather a key dynamic in negotiating certain key social issues of Mediterranean society."[14] In applying this idea of group negotiation to rabbinic Judaism, this chapter looks at a series of considerations of *birkat hamazon* and place. The rabbis explore: Where can one say *birkat hamazon*? What are the limits? In this larger discussion of the where to bless, rabbinic authors explore the place they occupy in the Roman world. Where others have argued for the words of *birkat hamazon* pointing to particular moments of Jewish history, I will instead invoke Pierre Bourdieu and Catherine Bell, whose models of practice allow us to examine the actions involved in reciting this blessing. These actions ultimately shape rabbinic actors into the particular Roman Jews, who will in turn shape the rabbinic movement.[15] In addition, James Fernandez emphasizes further pitfalls encountered when

considering only the words of prayers, questioning the extent to which a group shares any given liturgical meaning. These concerns heighten the importance of our study that looks beyond "what" was said to "how" and "where."

Following consideration of earlier research into *birkat hamazon*, and a further look at methodological concerns, this chapter examines rabbinic explorations of dining and *birkat hamazon* that occur in intriguingly different environments. The questions that emerge as rabbis dine and bless (1) at home, (2) in larger dining halls, and even (3) alfresco by the riverside, reveal a playfulness that accompanies serious investigations. Like Dr. Seuss's Sam-I-am, who proposed eating in a box, on a train, on a boat, or in the rain, rabbinic authors explore their actions through engaging diverse locations. The comparison can only go so far; the rabbis (who would not themselves have eaten Green Eggs and Ham offered by Sam-I-am in any case)[16] concern themselves with locations that define the group eating the meal, not the tastes of an individual. Nonetheless, the texts that explore the locations of eating share a certain zany energy that should intrigue all who want to know what it means to dine together. In engaging the question of "where" Jews dine, the rabbis present their diners in the world. Each new location reveals another negotiation. They go forth to dine, not only as individual diners, but also as a group where "three have dined as one," maintaining individual status within the group, since a single individual must issue the *zimmun* that leads to the blessing. Through this play of bringing together and keeping separate *birkat hamazon* continuously navigates the Roman world.[17] The social units formed, dissolved, and reformed around meals take their place in the changing and changeable culture of their time.

Examinations of *Birkat Hamazon*

Many others have recognized the importance of meals in rabbinic Judaism and in the creation of practices that have endured for centuries since that time. Some have productively considered the table as replacing the absent Temple;[18] others have examined dietary restrictions as defining a separate group;[19] and still

others have investigated table talk as shaping the ongoing relationships around the table.[20] And in some ways *birkat hamazon* partakes of all these kinds of explanations: as it displaces libations in other Hellenistic and Roman meals it heightens the absence of the Jews' own Temple; as it belongs with other food blessings it notices the food eaten; and as a spoken blessing it uses words and talk. Nonetheless, because the Temple has been absent for well over a century by the time of the Mishnah its absence may or may not be routinely experienced; because *birkat hamazon* occurs at the end of the meal it recalls rather than notices the nature of food, asking only in retrospect: Was this a meal?[21] Although words are important because the words of *birkat hamazon* constitute the only part of the practice of *birkat hamazon* remaining to us, we misconstrue the whole if we focus only on talk. All the aforementioned theories contribute to an understanding of mealtime blessings, but they do not appear sufficient to explain the role of *birkat hamazon* in knitting the group together.

Likewise, interpreters of the textual basis of *birkat hamazon* contribute to our understanding of the early development of the prayers. Moshe Weinfeld identifies a fragment from Qumran as *birkat hamazon* for the house of mourning. He supports his claim by tracing similarities and differences between this fragment, 4Q434, and talmudic presentations of *birkat hamazon*. He finds that this fragment "adduces clear evidence about the existence of the grace after meals at Qumran, not only in general cases but even in the specific case at the house of the mourner."[22] He makes such claims based on the talmudic references to special liturgies for the house of mourning (b. Ber 46b), and language in the fragments that overlap with these. The richness of this Qumran fragment is matched by the cache of later manuscripts containing versions of *birkat hamazon* found in the Cairo Geniza. These tenth- to thirteenth-century documents of poetic versions of *birkat hamazon* "served as complete alternatives," argues Avi Shmidman, supplanting rather than supplementing earlier talmudic versions.[23] He explores shared structure and the contrasting emphasis on biblical prooftexts, with an interest in later developments. As an aside, looking again at the Qumran 4Q434 from the perspective of

the biblical prooftext Isaiah 66:13, he suggests that fragment 4Q434 "might have been intended for the Sabbath rather than for the house of mourning."[24] Whether house of mourning or Sabbath, the careful emphasis on the words of these blessing by these two scholars recalls the complexity of these texts and their fluidity.

This care to recognize the ongoing changes signals an important move in scholarship of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Earlier studies sought to identify historic accounts, suggesting that it was Betar (mentioned in rabbinic literature) that triggered direct liturgical responses to these particular incidents.[25] Such theories had assumed a stable "rabbinic Judaism" that could respond in this way, whereas postmodern considerations of history challenge such assumptions.[26] Nevertheless, even with attention paid to the instability of rabbinic Judaism, by focusing exclusively on similarities and differences in the words of *birkat hamazon*, all these studies tell only part of the story. By looking only at the text apart from action, they lose much of what makes *birkat hamazon* significant. By contrast, our study must also confine itself to literary sources, but it supplements earlier explorations by noting how much rabbinic literature focuses on how and where its members practiced *birkat hamazon*. Yes, rabbis discuss the words of blessing to be included at the house of mourning, but the house of mourning is only one space of many that occupy rabbinic imagination concerning *birkat hamazon*. These practices were important enough that authors chose to report actions and interactions surrounding *birkat hamazon*, whether ideal or real. The actions include word choices, but the word choices always involve human actors choosing.

Rabbis present the recitations of *zimmun* and *birkat hamazon* as enacting the distinction between individual action and group action. According to the Mishnah, *zimmun* occurs only in a group; it occurs "when three dine as one."[27] Second, in the following narratives, the rabbis investigate what constitutes dining together; they negotiate the group's solidarity for the purposes of the meal. These negotiations contribute to the overall definition of what makes a rabbinic group. Finally,

the group of three who dine together "as one" becomes more than the sum of its parts. Other research has investigated the requirements that make up a rabbinic group: diners should be Jewish and not gentile; women seem less welcome than men at many meals; the rabbis distinguish between themselves and non-rabbinic Jews.[28] Nevertheless, stories concerning rabbinic meals (like those of other ancient narratives) do present unwanted guests.[29] Recalling that other ancient associations avoided the predicament of a small group banishing all who stand out and ending up with no members by instead offering guidelines concerning welcome diners, unruly diners, and ways that "the group" could devise penalties short of dismissal,[30] we can examine rabbinic practices as negotiating not only to select members based on certain distinctions, but also to balance differences. Within rabbinic Judaism, *birkat hamazon* steers a course that draws individuals together or moves them apart.

The enacting of *birkat hamazon* proves the perfect case for considering social formation because it parades the working of the group as well as group limits. Three who recite *birkat hamazon* as one state that they have dined together. Three exists as the lower size limit, as the smallest possible "group" explored by the rabbis. While rabbinic explorations of the need for a *minyan*/quorum in formal prayer prove similar in some instances, the debate in the case of formal prayer involves the nature and number of participants prior to prayer. It investigates which prayers may be said without a quorum. By contrast, people eat anyway. Meals provoke the opposite question, not "what will we do?" but "what have we done?" Have we "dined" together? This can never be just one question because it asks about number of diners, and it asks how they acted. These self-evaluating questions inquire whether the group should continue to act as a group, meanwhile examining whether it has acted as a recognizable rabbinic social unit thus far. These messier more organic questions about the group relationship of members with each other go beyond the simple exclusion of less desirable individuals and reveal an important dynamic of group formation.

Studying *Birkat Hamazon* as Ritual

Examining group formation within rabbinic Judaism depends upon studies of ritualization by Bell, who examines ritual as process, and Fernandez who probes the limits of relying on the "meaning" of liturgical acts. Following Bourdieu, Bell begins her exploration of ritualization by considering practice: "Practice is (1) situational; (2) strategic; (3) embedded in misrecognition of what it is in fact doing; and (4) able to reproduce or reconfigure a vision of the order of power in the world," (or what Bell also calls "redemptive hegemony.")[31] Her framework recognizes the way actions interact with many aspects of context. Ritualization then makes particular use of these four aspects of practice as it further "distinguishes itself from other practices."[32] Ritual does not stand separately as an object of inquiry. Rather, "ritual necessarily shares these four features of practice," and "by the practical logic by which ritual acts are generated vis-à-vis other ways of acting, ritualization will be more visible in terms of these four features."[33] This model reveals ritual forming and reconstituting itself through each new iteration. Although elsewhere I have considered how to apply all four features of Bell's model, in this chapter I track only the "situational" aspects of practice, because of its importance to place.[34] The talmudic focus on places in which rabbis recite *birkat hamazon* provides a remarkably fine opportunity for examining this blessing interacting with "situation." Whether consciously or unconsciously done, the rabbis emphasize situation as a variable of practice.

Scholars often consider blessings as part of "table talk." Dennis Smith argues that table talk constitutes a necessary part of the meal.[35] Jonathan Brumberg-Kraus explores the rabbinic development of such talk.[36] Rabbinic meals fit this paradigm and justify such a category with the rabbinic claim: "Three who dine together and share words of Torah, it is as if they have eaten from the table of God."[37] While *birkat hamazon*, with its allusions to biblical texts, certainly constitutes words of Torah, and while others have interpreted the symbolism and metaphorical power of blessings as words spoken at table,[38] this chapter explores these limits as well. Bell warns of demoting ritual by viewing it as the expression of ideas. According to Bell, the idea

that ritual is "depicting, modeling, enacting or dramatizing what are seen as prior conceptual ideals or values" assumes that ideas have the primary status, and relegates actions to a secondary position.[39] This study embraces Bell's challenge to approach *birkat hamazon* as diners actively negotiating with each other.

These negotiations take place on the level of action and process, not necessarily with any explicit reference to explicated ideas. Like Bell, Fernandez reveals the difficulty of depending on the meaning of the words of a blessing. He researches the tendency of ritual participants to resist examining the meaning of ritual. He distinguishes between social consensus and cultural consensus, observing how certain rites contribute to group unity, while spawning a great variety of conflicting interpretations of such rites.[40] Fernandez goes so far as to suggest that, for the community he has studied, social consensus rests on lack of interest in finding consensus concerning meaning.[41] This research proves most helpful to a study of *birkat hamazon*. It suggests that interest in social negotiations may even act in opposition to the interpretation of a blessing's meaning. Fernandez finds that group leaders have most invested in interpreting rites, and that others offer interpretations to an ethnographer but do not discuss them with each other.

Hypothetically, an ancient ethnographer might have found some ancient rabbinic participants interested in interpreting *birkat hamazon*, and others not so much. Following Fernandez, we must consider that interest in the meaning of *birkat hamazon* may or may not coincide with its practice. Furthermore, evidence for the meaning of *birkat hamazon* may appear at odds with negotiations of practice because centuries of later interpreters return to fragments of texts describing meaning in order to build upon earlier interpretations and/or develop new meanings, whereas these more recent interpreters cannot likewise recuperate the ritualized negotiations. As discussed earlier, this study will not weigh in one way or another on questions that examine meaning or the origins of meaning, except to question their sufficiency in reflecting upon practice. Instead, a focus on negotiations concerning where and how to recite *birkat hamazon* suggests that the authors and other participants navigated social space as they formed and reformed their own group.

Navigating Place

Reciting *birkat hamazon* at Home

We learn that *birkat hamazon* concerns "place" as well as food, when talmudic discussions explore the possibility of interrupting a meal. The rabbis debate whether diners can get up and come back without becoming obligated to say additional blessings:

> If the members of a company were reclining to drink, and they [precipitately] arose to go out to welcome a bridegroom or a bride, when they go out they do not need to recite a closing benediction; when they return they do not need to recite [another] opening blessing.[42]

This text examines how diners become rooted to the place in which they dine, and whether they could still be understood to remain as diners after a short interruption. The text arrives at the answer that if one of their company, for instance, an older or less mobile member, stays behind, they need not start over again. The group can endure in the one designated member until the others return. In addition to the greeting of the bride or bridegroom, the discussion expands to include interrupting in order to go to the synagogue or study house, and again concludes that leaving some companions behind to continue the meal makes the difference.[43]

At a further point in the debate, we learn that the concern about going and coming back might not even be an issue for "things which need a blessing in the same place," like *birkat hamazon*![44] By this logic, the debate could only concern a situation where they were drinking wine, but not eating (and thus might be required to say another wine blessing when they returned). By this answer, a meal that requires *birkat hamazon* belongs to the place it began and a person who left the table would necessarily return to that place, so there could be no question. The preceding debate situates group meals and *birkat hamazon* in intriguing ways. A group can separate and reunite. A group can designate part of itself to maintain its continuity. A part of the group may officially continue the meal in the absence of the whole. We see how dining together also

maintains active connections with worlds beyond their meal, in the form of people (brides and bridegrooms) and places (synagogues and study houses).

There are many sorts of interruptions. A prior narrative in this talmudic tractate offers a completely different case of outside worlds entering a meal. The arrival of the Sabbath means that it is time for the Sabbath blessings and with them the invoked presence of authorities who handle this situation differently.[45] This scenario emphasizes concern of the host, at a meal in his own home:

> Said R. Simeon b. Gamaliel to R. Jose: "Berabbi, is it your wish that we interrupt our meal and pay heed to the words of our colleague Judah [who argued that one should interrupt a meal to welcome the Sabbath]"? Said he to him: "Every other day you prefer my words to those of R. Judah, whereas now you prefer R. Judah's words in my very presence—'will he even ravish the queen before me in my own house?'"[46]

When his students offer the answer of Rabbi Judah, Rabbi Jose appears to take offense, and cites scripture to make his point, asking rhetorically (with King Ahasuerus from the book of Esther) whether his nemesis will stop at nothing to dishonor him, "will he even ravish the queen before me in my house?"[47] Perhaps he makes fun of himself when he places himself with the naïve king, and compares his rival with Haman as he accuses him of raping his students. Or perhaps he and the text felt the insult so keenly as to overlook the humor. In either case, the reader encounters a meal within a text, within a text about a meal, and the outside world entering, even into a meal enjoyed in the privacy of a rabbinic home. One meal invokes another, revealing that what happens at a meal does not remain isolated.

While homes could be open to guests, there must have been a range of fastidiousness concerning who would eat with whom, as indicated by: "It has been taught likewise: . . . and they would not sit at table without knowing their fellow diners."[48] Or certain hosts could command their guests, as in the narrative concerning King Jannai who brought Simeon into the

dining room to accuse him of fraud, then designated that he should to do the *zimmun*:

> He mixed wine for him in order that he might bless, whereupon [Simeon] said: "Let us say Grace for the food which Jannai and his companions have eaten." [Jannai] responded: "I have never heard 'Jannai' in this blessing!" [Simeon] exclaimed: "What do you want me to say? 'Let us bless the food which we have eaten," when I haven't eaten anything?!"[49]

With this sarcastic blessing, Simeon insists that he does not really belong to the group. His powerful host receives such a claim as disrespectful. This appears in contrast to the situation in which a diner or diners left and came back, but still belonged to the group. *Birkat hamazon* appears at the heart of this enacting of boundaries or openness, since a meal of more than three required reciting recognition of the "meal" and the "group." Normally the one designated to recite the *zimmun*, the invitation to *birkat hamazon*, treats this as an honor. Just as the host designated the *symposiarch* in classic symposiastic tradition, the rabbinic host designates the one who will lead *birkat hamazon*.[50] Just as the assembled washed after the meal before performing the libation, so the one responsible for saying the *zimmun* washed first in preparation for leading *birkat hamazon*.[51] Nevertheless, not all understood this tradition:

> The one who first washes his hands after a meal says the blessing. Rav and Rabbi Hiyya were once sitting before Rabbi at dinner. Rabbi said to Rav: "Get up and wash your hands." He saw him trembling [perhaps with fear that Rabbi might have found his hands dirty]. Rabbi Hiyya said to him: "Son of princes! He is telling you to review *birkat hamazon*.[52]

The narrative leaves the reason for Rav's lack of understanding ambiguous. Does he misunderstand because this practice is relatively new or remained in flux? Or is he particularly anxious or distracted? The latter seems particularly likely because of the teasing response of his colleague, Rabbi Hiyya, who gratuitously calls him, "Son of princes!" This text shares with the story of Jannai a certain anxiety about this ritual obligation,

and being designated to lead. In all these ways the texts concerning *birkat hamazon* reveal the complexity of the individuals' relationships to each other and to this belonging: whether these complexities involve physically leaving or entering; or rejecting or accepting the honor of leading at a meal, in this case the honor of leading the *zimmun*; or even misunderstanding the courtesies or cues belonging to the order of the rites. The focus on home reveals some of the intricacies of the group at its meal.

Reciting *birkat hamazon* in Other Dining Rooms

Despite the importance of the home in hosting a meal that requires saying *birkat hamazon*, the Talmud reveals rabbis hosting a dinner outside their own homes. The texts that explore this possibility remain vague concerning the specifics of such a location. Instead, they focus on the logistics of two parties sharing the same dining hall:

> When two groups (*haverot*) have been dining in the same space [literally: house], if some of them can see each other, then the two groups may recite *birkat hamazon* together; but if not, each group invites and recites to itself.[53]

Three ideas in this text demand further exploration: (1) the criteria for togetherness, (2) the nature of the group, and (3) the accommodations, called only *beit* [literally: house]. The text directly considers the question of what makes a group a group. It provides a short answer: seeing one another. The text's insistence upon the rabbis "seeing" each other does not inevitably mean that in another instance they would "see" themselves as inevitably belonging to the same group (Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper correctly insist that interpreting someone's actions does not equal reconstructing his or her self-understanding).[54] The text does not go that far. A group of people need not be comfortable with each other. Nonetheless, if they see each other they exist as one group. If two parties dine in two adjacent spaces, the space permits their separateness only when it includes a visual barrier.

The text does not mention why these parties share a space, nor does it comment to any great degree on their relationship to one another. They are called *haverot*, or associations. Some interpret *haverot* as a technical term for the name of the groups that existed prior to the rabbis, such as the Pharisees.[55] So the transmission of dining practices in reference to *haverot* may introduce a historical note to the discussions, such as *even when the groups were more separate than we are now, a combination of two groups that saw one another, joined together for their blessing*. Or, we may want to read *haverot* as simply "associations," a Hellenistic and Roman category suggesting groups that form for the purposes of dining and other activities.[56] Rabbinic use of this term may recognize that two rabbinic groups may share dining space as other associations might.

When Philip Harland explores the various kinds of associations in the ancient world he demonstrates a range of forms that associations can take from extended family groups to guilds and burial societies.[57] The rabbis constitute associations that hover between family groups and study guilds. Interestingly enough, even in the earlier examples of meals in the home, with the exception of references to the bride and bridegroom and the kings banquet hall, most of these stories concerned rabbis with rabbinic colleagues and/or students. Daniel Boyarin and Aryeh Cohen explore rabbinic texts and the rhetorical move from family units that physically beget children, to scholarly units that beget scholars.[58] Given this ambiguity, these associations could identify a literal family unit or a figurative one. The play in the terms *haverot*/association and *beit*/house or home allows for both the family gathering in the home and/or the scholarly association/guild in any dining space and masks the need to distinguish.

Parallel discussions involving two groups sharing a dining space occur in tractate Pesachim, concerning the celebration of Passover and its underlying biblical obligations. According to Pesachim, Exodus legislates that those eating the Passover offering together must constitute a household: "It shall be eaten in one house."[59] So here the interpretation of Exodus allows each association to stand as an acceptable "household" group:

> When two groups dine in one house, one group faces this way to eat, while the other faces that way to eat. The vessel for mixing

> wine is placed in the middle between the two parties. And when the waiter stands to mix the wine, he closes his mouth and turns his face until he arrives at his own group, and then he continues eating.[60]

The text emphasizes the shared aspects of the two groups as well as their distinction. In particular, the waiter enacts their proximity and distance, as he must eat with only his own group and turn his head away from the other group when swallowing. Nevertheless, they somehow have arranged to share the vessel for mixing wine.[61] These groups apparently shared some features, even if for this evening they eat and bless as different groups.

While *beit*/house describes household, it also defines the physical space being shared. Only one text concerning *birkat hamazon* offers more explication of the physical aspects of this space:

> Two groups dining in the same location may combine for the *zimmun*...Do we consider the Patriarch's house like one house or two? If it is customary to pass from one room to the other, they combine, if not, they don't.[62]

The size of the patriarch's house apparently allowed for more than one group to dine there. The idea of passing from one room to another indicates that there were different spaces, so that Tzvee Zahavy translates this: "where the doors between the rooms may be open or closed,"[63] presumably to hinder the passing back and forth. Alternately, recent archeological explorations at Sepphoris seem to indicate that the placement of the courtyard, mosaic floors, and columns more subtly separates dining spaces.[64]

In the context of Sabbath practices, the rabbis discuss the issue of private or shared space in order to decide whether they need to construct one or more *eruvin*—the special boundaries made prior to the Sabbath that allowed movement on the Sabbath: "Five associations observed the Sabbath in one *traqlin*."[65] This term can quickly be understood as a corruption of triclinium, dining room. One wonders, however, whether it should be singular or plural, since in Aramaic and rabbinic Hebrew, the ending "*in*" can designate a plural. If plural, then *traqlin* should be

translated as "one set of dining rooms." The discussion of the possible necessity of five *eruvin* makes more sense if the rooms are both autonomous and connected.

The study of other Hellenistic and Roman meals presents some additional possibilities of larger dining halls. Carolyn Osiek presented the archeology of an inn with halls for rent, owned by Julia Felix in Pompeii.[66] While Pompeii does not necessarily witness such an inn in the Galilee, it spells out the possibility of a space that allowed several groups to dine simultaneously. Could the rabbis have had access to such an inn? At the very least it testifies that other communal spaces existed with a sufficient number of triclinia so that groups could be distinct enough for separate festivities, which would include joining as a group to recite the blessing. Discussions of *birkat hamazon* indicate that diners must conclude in the place in which they began. While diners might get up and move about to visit other individuals or groups beyond their immediate gathering, the group maintained its own identity for *birkat hamazon*.

Despite this embrace of communal dining, and the recognition that larger halls could accommodate groups dining separately or together, at least some rabbis in one rabbinic text explicitly prohibit one space as inappropriate for such activities: "Synagogues . . . they do not behave frivolously in them . . . And they do not eat in them or drink in them."[67] This passage attempts to redefine the space of a "synagogue" as different from the space for an "association," although often these words are synonymous. Certainly the need for someone to prohibit eating establishes that not all would have recognized eating as a problem.

Many sources take for granted that Jews ate certain meals in synagogues. Considering comments by Origen, John Chrysostom, and inscriptional evidence, Matthew Martin concludes: "Whatever the reasons for the rabbinic prohibition on dining in the synagogue, what is eminently clear is that communal synagogue meals were conducted regardless."[68] Despite my agreement with the earlier, I take issue with Martin's reasoning that, "the rabbis wished to ban a cultic activity associated with other religious groups from the synagogue."[69] In light of

the close parallels between rabbinic and other Hellenistic and Roman meals, Martin needs more evidence to prove that rabbis saw meals as "associated with other religions."[70] Perhaps some rabbinic voices did feel threatened by the tone of such meals and tried to ban them. Alternately, trying to remove meals from synagogues may indicate a trend toward reconstituting the use of synagogues as for study and prayer only, in conjunction with the development of these practices. Some rabbis may have begun to redefine the synagogue and wished to separate out dining into other less articulated spaces like the patriarch's house, or an inn. As the rabbis navigate the cultural spaces open to them, they (or perhaps only some of them) also redefine their own spaces.

Reciting *birkat hamazon* on the Bank of the River

In addition to the inns of the later Greek and Roman worlds, one finds important spaces created out of doors. Perhaps the most famous example concerns Daphnis and Chloe, the lead characters in a novel by that name, raised in the wild, who travel to the city as part of their coming of age. They ultimately reject the finery of an urban court in order to embrace a pastoral world that is neither urban nor barbarian. Their wedding feast presents this strategic accommodation:

> The weather was fine, and so [Daphnis's father] spread out beds of green leaves, right there in front of the cave, and invited all the villages to sit and feasted them lavishly.[71]

The novel's conclusion self-consciously moves between its rustic setting and urban sophistication. Daphnis and Chloe remain tied to the social expectations of the city, as one critic argues, "They will never be able to recapture that natural innocence, will forever be nostalgic day-trippers in a world which is no longer really theirs."[72] Such fascination with acting in that "space between" finds its way to the Talmud as well. One of the longest treatments of *birkat hamazon* in talmudic literature occurs not in a home or a dining hall, but on the bank of the river.[73]

While one must be careful not to overstate the similarities between the eight-chapter story about love and sex versus the page-long exploration about the proper blessing after a river-side meal, nevertheless, the countryside figures in both and shapes the relationships of the people with each other. In the rabbinic text, the students of Rav participated in the funeral procession. On their return trip they decide to eat their meal by the river, but when they finish they cannot be sure what kind of meal they just ate:

> After they had eaten, they sat and discussed the question: When we learnt "reclining," is it to be taken strictly, as excluding sitting, or, perhaps, when they say "Let us go and eat bread in such and such a place," it is as good as reclining? They could not find the answer.[74]

They realize that the rules must be different here than in a dining room. Everyone knows what reclining is in a dining room, but on the river bank, in a different kind of meal, that which looks like "sitting" might be virtually reclining insofar as outdoor dining is relatively less formal. Like the feast in *Daphnis and Chloe*, that which looks like a woodland floor can stand in the stead of a formal dining room. The students debate the nature of their meal and whether they should say *birkat hamazon* together as would befit a group who had reclined together, and thus they negotiate the very nature of their group.

The Babylonian Talmud offers this example in order to complicate the overarching rule from the Mishnah that if one is "sitting" each one blesses for himself.[75] This complication focuses our attention on the interplay between location, posture, group, and blessing. Even though rules govern how the group recites a blessing, the living quality of this ritualization necessitates that the group act out its relationship through this blessing in different ways in different locations. The social expectations of formality vary according to location, thus, so does the ritual expectation. The extremity of out-of-doors extends the range of these practices, while nevertheless establishing continuity with other dining habits. The text presents them on the river bank where the disciples of Rav suspect that they should act "as if" they reclined. When they continue to tease out this question,

however, they find themselves at a loss. At this point, they understand themselves as students without the teacher they have just buried. The text presents their relationship with each other as not only engaging the riverbank location, but also their sense of themselves as inadequate to the task before them:

> They could not find the answer. Rabbi Adda b. Ahabah rose and . . . made another rent in his clothes, saying, Rav is dead and we have not finished learning the rules about *birkat hamazon*! At length an old man came and pointed out the contradiction between the Mishnah and the Baraita, and solved it by saying, "Once they have said, 'Let us go and eat bread in such and such a place,' it is as if they were reclining."[76]

As it happens, their rescuer comes to the conclusion that they had first considered, as they had acted in relation to their outdoors location. Nevertheless, the fractured relationships of this group at this time of loss necessitates that they cannot recognize their own answer.

Although this riverbank was not officially a house of mourning, it did reveal students mourning the loss of their teacher. And like the house of mourning, people come to reintegrate the mourning into the community. This new rescuer stands in place of their teacher. His guidance for their practice redeems not only this situation, but also makes the additional point that their group must not stray too far into the wilderness to a place where they could receive no answers and therefore no longer retain their role as students. The answer appears not only as an answer to this question, but also reinforces the need for a guide because there will be other questions. *Birkat hamazon* reenacts not only their status vis-à-vis each other, but in addition it reenacts their relationship with the social world from which they may appear removed, but which they encounter through each other even in this marginal rabbinic space.

Conclusions

These narratives present rabbis acting toward and with each other through the recitation of *birkat hamazon*. Their interactions reveal fissures in their relationships even as their actions move to maintain their social network. We witness an ongoing

process. The parallel structures relating to wine, honors, washing, and reciting, found in Hellenistic and Roman libation and in rabbinic *birkat hamazon*, hint at deep connections. Participating in these meals establishes the rabbis as able to navigate Roman culture, even as, through these mealtime blessings, they form their own groups.

The rabbis develop these practices and their relationships to each other in the context of concrete situations or spaces. They establish family-like associations in relationship to home, but these various homes become interwoven as rabbinic teachers and students move from one space to another. Larger halls accommodate further exploration of groups that intermingle, asking when groups should remain separate and when they should join together. Finally, the untamed riverbank serves to negotiate the margins of these social relationships. These social connections do stretch, but as in parallel novelistic investigations in the ancient world, the wilderness reveals threats to ongoing interactions. Even as the rabbis negotiate how to dine and bless in all these spaces, we see glimpses of some rabbis beginning to negotiate the removal of the synagogue from the list of such social spaces.

This approach to ritual reveals how much social business occurs through *birkat hamazon* without ever alluding to its words or their interpretation. This engagement in social interaction and in exploring space argues for the need of ritual studies to continue to recall alternative contexts, and to continue the work of Bell and of Fernandez, which examine ritual as ongoing process and not as an object. The recitation of *birkat hamazon* negotiates and renegotiates the central relationships of rabbinic Judaism: the relationship between teacher and student, scholarly companions, scholarly rivals, mourners, and the community rejoicing with the brides and bridegrooms that will reproduce this world. Whether by the river, in a large hall, or at their own house, groups separate out, while reinstating these core relationships within the larger networks. These relationships simultaneously tie diners to the Hellenistic and Roman conventions of meals, enacting an identity consonant with the larger cultural moment and establishing their credibility as

religious participants in the Roman world. Even as they reinforce ties within the rabbinic group that lead in and out of the dining room, they recreate themselves as players in the larger community.

Notes

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1. Wine libation is just one of a number of Roman libation and sacrificial practices, but "data from domestic shrines suggests that *libationes* of liquids, incense, fruits, or cakes were often seen as more practicable and economically more feasible, and hence much more common, than animal sacrifice," Andreas Bendlin, "Libations, Roman," in *The Encyclopedia of Ancient History*, ed. Roger S. Bagnall, Kai Brodersen, Craige B. Champion, Andrew Erskine, and Sabine R. Huebner, 4052–4053 (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2013). See Hal Taussig, *In the Beginning Was the Meal: Social Experimentation and Early Christian Identity* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2009), 79–82, for an exploration of the power dynamics of role of *symposiarch.*
2. Katherine M. D. Dunbabin, *The Roman Banquet: Images of Conviviality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 24, explains that although most drinking wine is mixed, wine poured to gods is unmixed, 20. By the time of Hellenistic and Roman meals, one no longer finds the large krater for mixing wine, but smaller personal vessels.
3. Dunbabin, *The Roman Banquet*, 21.
4. *m. Avod Zar* 2.3. The biblical foundation of this prohibition (Deut 32:28) indicates that concern with libation practices likely predates awareness of Greek and Roman practices, nevertheless, the rabbis work out halalchic details of what it means to benefit from this wine, see Simcha Fishbane *Deviancy in Early Rabbinic Literature*

(Leiden: Brill, 2007), 153. Jeffrey Lawrence Rubenstein, "The Sukkot wine libation," in *Ki Baruch Hu; Ancient Near Eastern, Biblical, and Judaic Studies in Honor of Baruch A. Levine*, ed. Robert Chazan, William W. Hallo, and Lawrence H. Schiffman, 575–591 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1999), explores traces of Jewish wine libation practices in connection with Sukkot, although these do not seem to happen in the context of a meal.

5. It is not my intention in this chapter to chart the origin of *birkat hamazon* nor am I suggesting that Hellenistic and Roman meals alone contributed to the nuanced and developed practice of *birkat hamazon*. I am grateful to questions by Elizabeth Shanks Alexander and Annette Reed wondering about what other traditions are represented by the rabbinic practice of bookending blessings both before and after a meal, and the impact of Persian meals, presumably both before the time of Alexander as well as mixed among the Babylonian Talmud's recollections of Palestinian practices. Explorations of both of these threads would no doubt also prove most interesting. Nevertheless, there are many ways to bookend practices, and the use of wine and the place and manner in which it appears needs to be examined. Likewise, regardless of what scholars will find regarding Persian meals, Jews had centuries of exposure to Hellenistic and Roman meals, and their impact on *birkat hamazon* has hitherto gone unexplored.
6. Dennis E. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist: The Banquet in the Early Christian World* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), 44–45, discusses ways of enacting status at Greek and Roman Meals as well as voices such as Martial and Pliny that "argue against prevailing customs."
7. *b. Ber* 45b. Translations from the Babylonian Talmud are my own and/or adapted from Maurice Simon ed., *The Soncino Talmud: Berakoth* (London: Soncino Press, 1948).
8. *m. Ber* 7.1. Translations not cited are my own adapted from Tzvee Zahavy, *The Mishnaic Law of Blessings and Prayers: Tractate Berekhot* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1987); or Philip Blackman, *Mishnayot* (New York: Judaica Press, 1964). Differences in *birkat hamazon* between the tannaitic or early rabbinic sources (200 CE) and the amoraic, or later sources such as the two Talmuds (400–500 CE) will not be discussed. This remains an area for further research.
9. *m. Ber* 7.3.
10. Mishnah tractate Berakhot lays out these and other categories, and explores protocols for blessing, see David C. Kraemer, *Jewish Eating and Identity through the Ages* (New York: Routledge,

2007), 73–86; see also Zahavy, *The Mishnaic Law of Blessings*, 77–97.

11. See *b. Ber* 41b., which explains that "a blessing over bread suffices for other foods integral to the meal."
12. *m. Ber* 8.8.
13. Rubenstein, "The Sukkot wine libation," examines a libation in conjunction with Sukkot water drawing at the Temple.
14. Taussig, *In the Beginning Was the Meal,* 85.
15. For more on the Roman context, see Hayim Lapin, *Rabbis as Romans: The Rabbinic Movement in Palestine, 100–400 CE* (New York: Oxford, 2012).
16. Dr. Seuss, *Green Eggs and Ham* (New York: Beginner Books, 1960). This study does not address questions of "what" will be eaten since recent research covers these admirably, see Kraemer, *Jewish Eating*; Brumberg-Kraus, "Were the Pharisees a Conversionist Sect? Unpublished paper, 2002 (http://acunix.wheatonma.edu/jkraus/articles/Pharisees.htm); and Jordan D. Rosenblum, *Food and Identity in Early Rabbinic Judaism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).
17. For reasons not completely understood, rabbinic Judaism, the religion of the rabbis, became the default Judaism by the end of the sixth century. Since rabbinic claims to authority explicitly featured new stringencies and the intellectual ability to interpret the covenant shared by all Jews, their success raises questions concerning how a small group of interpreters could engage sufficient support from the local population to justify their recognition as leaders. While answers to this question will not be found all in one place, the role of *birkat hamazon* in constructing rabbinic Judaism appears intriguing.
18. Baruch M Bokser, *The Origins of the Seder*: *The Passover Rite and Early Rabbinic Judaism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 89–93; Bokser, "Ma'al and Blessings over Food: Rabbinic Transformation of Cultic Terminology and Alternative Modes of Piety," *JBL* 100 (1981): 569–570, discusses a move from Temple centered to God centered.
19. Kraemer, *Jewish Eating,* 25–37. See also Rosenblum, *Food and Identity*, 35–102.
20. Dennis E. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist: The Banquet in the Early Christian World* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), 51–54 and 254–258; Brumberg-Kraus, "Meals as Midrash: A Survey of Ancient Meals in Jewish Studies Scholarship," in *Food and Judaism*, vol.15 ed. L. J. Greenspoon, R. A. Simkins, and G. Shapiro, 306–307 (Omaha, NE: Creighton University Press,

2005), see esp. pages mentioned; "The Ritualization of Scripture in Rabbenu Bahya Ben Asher's Eating Manual Shulhan Shel Arba," *World Congress of Jewish Studies* 13 (2001); and "'Not by Bread Alone . . . ': Food and Drink in the Rabbinic Seder and in the Last Supper." *Semeia 86: Food and Drink in the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament*, edited by A. Brenner and J. W. van Henten, 165–191 (1999).

21. Did this occasion, for instance, include enough bread to qualify as a meal?
22. Moshe Weinfeld, "Grace after Meals in Qumran," *JBL* 111 (1992): 427–440, esp. 429.
23. Avi Shmidman, "Developments within the Statutory Text of the *birkat ha-mazon* in light of its Poetic Counterparts," in *Jewish and Christian Liturgy and Worship: New Insights into Its History and Interaction,* ed. Albert Gerhards and Clemens Leonhard (Leiden; Boston, MA: Brill, 2007), 110.
24. Shmidman, "Developments," 123 n.46. He argues based on other manuscripts that contain this verse.
25. Although Weinfeld focuses on talmudic language concerning the house of mourning, he distinguishes himself from a thread of the last century's scholarship, which argued that *birkat hamazon* ideas concerning God "who is good and does good," as recited in *birkat hamazon* [including *birkat hamazon* when it was recited in the house of mourning] appear only after the events at Betar where so many of Bar Kokhba's defending forces died that "burying the dead was considered a miracle." Weinfeld, "Grace," 435.
26. See, for instance, Roger Chartier, "Text, Symbols, and Frenchness," *Journal of Modern History* 57 (1985): 682–695.
27. *m. Ber* 7.1.
28. Rosenblum, *Food and Identity,* explores all these identity issues as they concern Tannaitic (early rabbinic) meals. See also Brumberg-Kraus, "Were the Pharisees a Conversionist Sect?" regarding Pharisaic table fellowship rules. Others treat talmudic exclusion/inclusion of women more extensively, see Marjorie Lehman, "Women and Passover Observance: Reconsidering Gender in the Study of Rabbinic Texts," in *Women and Judaism: Studies in Jewish Civilization,* vol. 14, ed. L. J. Greenspoon, R. A. Simkins, and J. A. Cahan, 45–66, (Omaha, NE: Creighton University Press, 2003); and Judith Hauptman, *Rereading the Rabbis: A Woman's Voice,* 229–233 (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998), see esp. pages mentioned.
29. Regarding unwanted guests, see Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 22–23; see also Marks, *First Came Marriage:*

The Rabbinic Appropriation of Early Jewish Wedding Ritual (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2013), 169–170.

30. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 119–131; and Philip Harland, *Associations, Synagogues, and Congregations: Claiming a Place in Ancient Mediterranean Society* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2003), 75–76.
31. Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 81.
32. Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice,* 89.
33. Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice,* 89.
34. Susan Marks, "History vs. Ritual in Time and End-Time: The Case of Early Rabbinic Weddings in Light of Catherine Bell," *JAAR* 79, no. 3 (2011): 587–613, and *First Came Marriage*.
35. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 51–54, 200–214 and 254–258.
36. Brumberg-Kraus, "The Ritualization of Scripture." See also his chapter (5) in this volume.
37. *m. Avot* 3.3.
38. Louis Finkelstein, "The Birkat Ha-Mazon," *JQR* 19 (1929): 211–262, esp. 213–214; Weinfeld, "Grace," 435–436; and Brumberg-Kraus, "Were the Pharisees,"14, explores the significance of considering "God as if present 'Himself' as host of the meal."
39. Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, 37–46.
40. James Fernandez, "Symbolic Consensus in a Fang Reformative Cult," *AA* 67 (1965): 902–929, esp. 906.
41. Fernandez, "Symbolic Consensus," 923. Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, 228–229, no.59, applauds Fernandez because he does not attempt to reduce the social to the cultural, as Geertz does in the case of the Javanese funeral.
42. *b. Pes* 101b.
43. *b. Pes* 102a
44. *b. Pes* 102a
45. Gil Klein, "Torah in Triclinia: The Rabbinic Banquet and the Significance of Architecture," *JQR* 102, no. 3 (2012): 336, recently discusses this story in his consideration of the significance of the architecture of the *triclinia* "to the understanding of the rabbinic institution of the banquet." His article helpfully emphasizes the proximity of the street and the porousness of the banquet hall.
46. *b. Pes* 100a, citing Esther 7.8.
47. Esther 7.8.
48. *b. San* 23a.
49. *Gen Rab* 91.3.

50. Taussig, *In the Beginning Was the Meal*, 77, investigates "the curious ambivalence of placing the libation at the most pivotal moment of the meal and at the same time underplaying its performance." He likewise considers important tensions surrounding the symposiarch's leadership that find their analogue in the following discussion, 79–82.
51. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 28.
52. *b. Ber* 43a.
53. *m. Ber* 7.5.
54. Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, "Beyond 'Identity,'" *Theory and Society* 29 (2000): 5, emphasize the distinction between action and self-understanding, "the mere use of a term as a category of practice to be sure, does not qualify it as a category of analysis." See also Rosenblum, *Food and Identity*, 1–14.
55. Joseph Heinemann, "Birkath Ha-Zimmun and Havurah-Meals," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 13 (1962): 26, argues that the *zimmun* was fixed early on, "in connection with community meals of the *havurah*-type" since the blessings precede the standardization of the blessing formulas. See also Brumberg-Kraus, "Were the Pharisees a Conversionist Sect?" and his continued exploration of these ideas in chapter 1 of this volume.
56. Philip Harland, *Associations, Synagogues, and Congregations: Claiming a Place in Ancient Mediterranean Society* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2003).
57. Harland, *Associations, Synagogues, and Congregations,* 25–53.
58. Daniel Boyarin, *Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); and Aryeh Cohen, *Rereading Talmud: Gender, Law and the Poetics of Sugyot* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1998).
59. The phrase "*be-beit ehad*" appears in *m. Pes* 7.13, echoing the same phrase in Ex 12.46. For further discussion see Rosenblum, *Food and Identity*, 163–166.
60. *m. Pes* 7.13. The text continues with the statement that the bride would also face away when she ate.
61. This shared vessel might either indicate the continuation of Hellenistic practices in Palestine well into the Roman period, or the anachronistic vision of this text, as Dunbabin, *The Roman Banquet*, 24, reports that: "Recent studies have drawn attention to the apparent disappearance of *kraters* from the repertory of Hellenistic ceramics."
62. *p. Ber* 7.5.
63. Zahavy trans.
64. Klein, "Torah in Triclinia," 365.

65. *m. Erub* 6.6. See Rosenblum, *Food and Identity*, 177.
66. Osiek, "What Kinds of Meals."
67. *t. Meg* 2.18. See also Rosenblum, *Food and Identity*, 178–182,
68. Matthew Martin, "Communal Meals in the Late Antique Synagogue," in *Feast, Fast or Famine. Food and Drink in Byzantium: Byzantina Australiensia,* vol. 15, ed. W. Mayer and S. Trzcionka, 135–146 (Brisbane: Australian Association for Byzantine Studies, 2005), esp. 142. See also my discussion of a synagogue inscription that records a vow made at a wedding feast, in Marks, *First Came Marriage*, 171. Lee Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue: The First Thousand Years* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 394, suggests that this was "a major donation to the local synagogue that was made at a banquet, quite possibly held on the synagogue premises."
69. Martin, "Communal Meals," 142.
70. Earlier surveys concerning Jewish meals include Brumberg-Kraus, "Meals as Midrash"; and Joshua Kulp, "The Origins of the Seder and Haggadah." *CBR* 4, no.1 (2005): 109–134; as well as chapter 1 of the present volume.
71. Longus, "Daphnis and Chloe," trans. Christopher Gill, in *Collected Ancient Greek* Novel, ed. B. P. Reardon, 285–348 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), esp. 348.
72. J. R. Morgan, "Daphnis and Chloe: Love's Own Sweet Story," in *Greek Fiction: The Greek Novel in Context,* ed. J. R. Morgan and Richard Stoneman, 64–79 (New York: Routledge, 1994), esp. 69.
73. *b. Ber* 42b-43a.
74. *b. Ber* 42b.
75. *m. Ber* 6.6.
76. *b. Ber* 42b-43a.

CHAPTER 5

Performing Myth, Performing Midrash at Rabbinic Meals

Jonathan Brumberg-Kraus

A major achievement of our seminar has been the recognition that all formal banquets of the Greco-Roman period more or less assume and draw from the same set of conventions of Greco-Roman symposia. They differ in the different selection, emphasis, and combination of these conventions by the groups who perform the meals, and in the different meanings those groups attribute to their particular performances of them. In light of this, it seems increasingly clear that we need to focus more attention to myths, to the numinous "back stories" put into play at the Greco-Roman banquets we study, especially early Jewish and Christian meals. Through various ritual strategies, communal myths of identity and aspiration are evoked to encourage participants to experience their "ordinary meal" as somehow "enhanced," as part of a broader, deeper social, historical, cosmic drama. We saw particularly striking examples of this in Philo's account of the Therapeutai and Therapeutrides's ritual reenactment of the crossing of the Red Sea through their antiphonal choral singing and dance.[1] Whether or not really Therapeutae ever did this or they werea product of Philo's fantasy, Philo was not alone among Greco-Roman Jews in recommending that certain specific passages from the Torah be recited, sung, taught, or explained over the dinner table. In particular, the early rabbinic meals prescribed and described in

the Tannaitic sources adopt the sympotic convention of appropriate table talk about meal topics—as they put it, *divre torah al hashulhan* ("words of Torah" both about and literally "over the table")—to bring their communal myths of identity and aspiration to bear on the participants' experience of performing the meals.

These words of Torah recited, sung, and explained at the table do not stand alone, but are integral parts of a ritual process. They are what Jane Harrison would call the "things said" (*legomena*) component of her tripartite model of ritual based on ancient Greek mysteries: "things said," "things done" [*dromena*], and "things shown" (*deiknymena*).[2] The thesis of this paper is that the strategic placement of "words said" at rabbinic meals are meant to be a kind of interpretation, midrash, of the things done and shown at the meal (and vice versa). This is a distinctively early rabbinic way of deploying Jewish myths at meals, which proved to have legs in subsequent Jewish meal practices.

I use the term myth to refer to culturally specific language that is imaginative, symbolic, sensually evocative, and emotionally charged. Myths are stories that groups of people tell. Or they elliptically allude to verbal or gestural shorthand, which both consciously and unconsciously shape their relationships to other people and the natural world around them. Ninian Smart's discussion of the "mythic/narrative" dimension as one of six dimensions of "worldviews" has somewhat influenced my use of the term "myth" and its relation to ritual, as has Victor Turner's essay, "Social Dramas and Stories About Them."[3] In other words, myth to me is primarily something linguistic or language-like, in which narrative and symbolic reference are crucial components. I also consider mythic language to have a numinous quality. This is not necessarily because of something *essentially* "sacred" behind it (though I admit that Jungian theory of archetypes shape my thinking), but rather because that is mythic language's rhetorical intent—to use words to evoke emotionally charged experiences of "the sacred" (however a particular culture constructs it, if it even does so at all).[4] There should be no question that both Biblical and rabbinic Jewish cultures

construct experiences of "the holy" by labeling objects, people, times, and the Deity as *kadosh*, literally "set apart." Indeed, rabbinic Hebrew often uses the verbal form *le-kadesh* to mean "to say or do something to make it holy," as in the expressions "sanctify the day" (to say a Sabbath or holiday *Kiddush* blessing) or "sanctify the Name" (*kiddush ha-Shem*—doing something that bears witness and inspires awe toward God, including martyrdom). So I use the terms "myth" or "mythic" primarily refer to the "words of Torah" or words of blessing used explicitly or implicitly to ascribe "holiness" to their ritual actions and the experiences they are intended to evoke.[5]

Nevertheless, I attempt to give some sort of phenomenological content to the experiences of holiness, which I argue the mythic language of rabbinic meal rituals is intended to evoke. In that sense, I follow Mircea Eliade and Rudolf Otto, or better, the other scholars inspired by their phenomenological approach whom I cite throughout this essay. So what are the qualities rabbinic mythic language is supposed to evoke? According to Ruth Fredman Cernea and Baruch Bokser, the mythic rabbinic language of the Passover seder conveys a "timeless quality."[6] Another aspect of rabbinic mythic language is what I call its "*ke-ilu* ['as if'] quality." This is an "is/is not" metaphorical awareness quite important to the Tannaitic rabbis' conceptualization of how their sacred myths of the Torah are to be deployed at meals.[7] Thus, when rabbinic texts use a demonstrative "*this* is" to introduce a scriptural passage to be recited at a meal, the palpable context implicitly puts more emphasis on the "is" rather than the "is not" dimension of the metaphor, though the word "ke-ilu" keeps the "is not" from being completely forgotten. This kind of midrash applied to the events of the table is "mythically" metaphorical precisely in this way. However, by calling rabbinic metaphors mythic, I do not mean "untrue" in the sense that "we as modern critical outside observers of religious phenomena know them to be," in contrast to their precritical beliefs, or to imply that the rabbis themselves did not believe that supernatural beings really existed. On the contrary, rabbinic myth emphasizes stories where the actors are supernatural beings, especially stories about the creation of how things now

originally came to be *ab illo tempore.*[8] The last important qualities of rabbinic mythic language I discuss are its predilection for associative thinking, and for what Marc Bregman describes as midrashic visualization, namely evocations of dream-like experiences of "condensed, symbolic, immediately visual images."[9] Suffice it to say that while the theoreticians I mention here and subsequently inform my understanding of myth, I use the terms "myth" and "mythic" primarily pragmatically. They are shorthand for the particular set of emotionally evocative, narrative, and symbolic features of the words said in rabbinic meals, which I have summarized here and will expand upon in what follows.

From the early rabbinic Passover seder prescribed in the Mishnah, to medieval Jewish mystical meal manuals such as R. Bahya ben Asher's *Shulhan Shel Arba* recommending apt Biblical and rabbinic passages as talking points; to the early modern and contemporary versions of a Tu Bishvat Haggadah, rubrics for reciting passages from the Bible, Talmud, and Zohar in praise of fruits in honor of the New Year of the Trees (and frequently employed by contemporary Jewish environmentalists), saying words from sacred books at the table have become almost a *sine qua non* of Jewish Sabbath and festival meals.[10] Namely Jewish stories are applied to the physical experiences of the meals, and the physical experiences themselves—sweet and bitter tastes, flickering flames, the pleasant intoxicating buzz of the wine, cracking nutshells, or even the postprandial drowsiness often felt at the end of a satisfying meal—implicitly "comment" back on stories.[11] As the modern Jewish foodie movement puts it in the words of the neo-Hasidic Rebbe Shlomo Carlebach, "The Torah is a commentary on the world, and the world is a commentary on the Torah."[12]

In this view, which originates from early rabbinic meal practices, meals and all they involve are a microcosm of the natural and social world, and Torah has something to say about them. Each reciprocally supplies contexts of interpretation for the other. In other words, to say "Blessed are You YHWH our God, King of the Universe, who brings forth bread from the earth"[13] with the bread right in front of you, or "Because God

'passed over' [*pasah*] over our fathers' homes in Egypt"[14] and "Because the Egyptians embittered [*marreru*] our fathers lives in Egypt"[15] just before one does not eat a *pesah* lamb sacrifice but does eat the bitter herb, maror, at the Passover seder are actually rather complex interpretations of Torah in which Jewish myth, ritual, and doctrine are fused into single psychosomatic experiences.

I will use the rabbinic Passover seder, the Mishhnah Avot 3:3 tradition about saying "words of Torah" over the table, rabbinic table blessings, and Rabbenu Bahya ben Asher's postrabbinic medieval interpretation and expansion upon the Avot tradition as examples to sketch out a trajectory of the ritual use of words of Torah to perform Jewish myths by performing midrash at meals. I justify my use of fourteenth-century Spanish kabbalist and Biblical exegete R. Bahya ben Asher's interpretation of rabbinic meal practices for an essay ostensibly on early rabbinic meals as an expression of the fourth of the ten theses we stated elsewhere in this volume.[16] Namely that there is a *rabbinic* "sympotic ethic," adopted from Greek and Roman meal practices and literary representations of them, that can be traced across a trajectory from Pharisaic *havurot*, Tannaitic meal traditions (the Passover seder, "*divre torah al ha-shulhan*," table *berakhot*), Amoraic meal traditions (*midrashim*, especially stories with meal settings and the *Derekh Eretz* literature), and even through postrabbinic, kabbalistic meal traditions (and even up to the contemporary "new Jewish food movement").

I skip from the Tannaitic traditions directly to the postrabbinic, kabbalistic meal traditions I discuss merely to illustrate my point that rabbinic table talk as an example of its sympotic ethic had a postrabbinic Jewish afterlife long after ancient Greek and Roman symposia were cultural norms. Also, I think R. Bahya made explicit what I think was implicit in the strategies of early rabbinic traditions and their use of scriptural passages and blessings to involve meal participants in performing rabbinic myths.

There are several ways in which scholars have characterized the ways that myths are deployed in rabbinic meal rituals. Joseph Tabory, in his research of the Passover Haggadah,

distinguishes two different ways the words of the Passover seder are connected to the other ritual actions: "remembrance" versus "reenactment." Thus, when one mentions the bitter herb in the haggadah, "telling" of the Passover story "because the Egyptians embittered our fathers' lives, that's a remembrance. But when one postpones the singing of triumphant Psalm 114 of Hallel "*betzeyt yisrael mi-mitzrayim…*" to after the meal (according to the school of Shammai), one is "reenacting" the Exodus from Egypt. The Hallel psalms are like the song at the sea that the Israelites sang, having miraculously crossed the Red Sea, after they had sacrificed and eaten the Pesah lamb. Hence, to reenact the Exodus at the seder, one doesn't sing this "song at the sea" until after eating the Passover meal.[17] Tabory seems to imply that reenacting is somehow a "more mythic" experience than remembering, as if singing and reenacting dissolves more thoroughly the "what they did then/ what we're doing now" awareness, than if one merely spoke words about the Exodus as a sort of self-conscious mnemonic.

Without drawing the same distinction between *shirah* and *haggadah* (singing vs. telling the story), Cernea similarly suggests that the mythic dimension of the Passover ritual resides in its timeless quality:

> The Seder works with time on many levels, presenting the Exodus as a historical event as well as paradigmatic sequence explaining the experience of the Jews for all times. The Exodus is both history a sequence of events, and myth, a timeless explanatory model for the society's existence, and this "mythical history" is made objective and palpable through the objects and actions of the rituals.[18]

Bokser takes Fredman a step further to say that the style of the Mishnah itself that prescribes the rabbinic seder has a "timeless quality [especially] suited to the specific mythic nature of the Passover rite":

> In describing the order of Passover eve and in setting out the rules of etiquette in chronological sequence, the Mishnah creates a single narrative in which attributed comments and the occasional disputes are integrated. It formulates much of the narrative with a participle construction used for the present tense and therefore

> suggests a timeless procedure that ostensibly remains unaffected by history.[19]

It's the narrative's linguistic style that gives it its "mythic" quality of timelessness, not necessarily something inherently "deeply symbolic" about the story itself.[20] Though given my Jungian predilections, I don't rule that out.

Now Mishnaic legal traditions like these are traditionally understood as having been composed and recited in a *bet midrash* (a rabbinic "house of study") and not necessarily at a meal. These traditions about the Passover seder may or may not be an exception that proves the rule, since it is possible that meals were indeed the original setting for some teachings about meals.[21] However, in the rabbinic house of study, they get "homogenized" into precisely the kind of "timeless" style Bokser says is typical throughout the Mishnah. Of course, Bokser points to this language as a symptom of the rabbis' "post-traumatic stress" response to the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, especially when they described or prescribed practices that pertained to the Temple and priesthood connected with it. The mythic timeless linguistic style of the Mishnah taught in the *bet midrash* allowed the rabbis to continue to engage (at least in words) in the activities of the Temple after its physical destruction. Here, even words of Torah about the table in the Mishnah that were originally uttered in a *bet midrash* clothed the Passover rite in a mythic aura of timelessless, or better, in Eliade's terms, a "return" *in illo tempore*. How much the more so when rabbis and their disciples took these words "about the table" out of the *bet midrash* and performed them at their banquets literally "over the table."

Mythic language is also usually highly metaphorical. Metaphor has been said to be a way of simultaneously saying that one thing both is and is not another thing.[22] In tannaitic tradition we have metaphorical words of Torah about the table in *bet midrash* discussions of the table (but not necessarily at the table), and in words specifically prescribed to be said over the table, like the scripture passages at the Passover seder that we just mentioned, and in most of the blessings to be recited at

the table. Perhaps the most well-known example of the first sort of metaphorical saying is the one from Mishnah Avot 3:3:

> R. Simeon said, "Three who have eaten at one table and have not said words of Torah over it, it is as if they have eaten from sacrifices of the dead [mi-zivkhey metim], as it is said, "All the tables are full of vomit and filth without room for anything else [bli makom]." (Is. 28:8) But if three have eaten at one table and have spoken over it words of Torah, it as if they have eaten from the table of God, as it is written (Ezek. 41:22), "And he told me: This is the table that stands before the Lord."

Here tables over which three or more have eaten and said no words of Torah are compared to idolatrous sacrifices, revolting to the senses and clearly not to God (playing on a rabbinic term for God, "ha-Makom," lit. "the Place"). In contrast, the table over which three of more have eaten, and said words of Torah, is like the sacrificial altar of the Temple in Jerusalem (to which the verse from Ezekiel refers)—"the table of God." Eating plus Torah table talk is and is not the same as performing the sacrifices in God's Temple in Jerusalem, an awareness that the emphatic repetition of "as if" (*ke-ilu*) shows.

But what if one were to recite the very verse from Ezekiel 41:22: "This is the table that stands before the Lord" that is the "punchline" of Mishnah Avot 3:3 *while one was sitting at the dinner table*? Here the postrabbinic reception of this tradition makes it explicit that any discussion of Torah at the table transforms it into a "table that stands before the Lord." For that is exactly what R. Bahya ben Asher has in mind much later in the fourteenth century, when he uses Ezekiel 41:22 to begin his book *Shulhan Shel Arba* on how to use blessings, torah table talk, and other rabbinically prescribed table rituals to make one's table holy as if it were an altar before the Lord. To this end, he expects his readers to have his how-to book at their side at the table.[23] This contextualization of the demonstrative "*this*" of the scriptural passage from Ezekiel at a dinner table seems to put more emphasis on the "is" rather than the "is not" dimension of the metaphor.

Something similar occurs in rabbinic blessings over food, drink, and other activities at the table. In a sense, the formulation

of the most basic rabbinic blessings over food and drink at the table are fundamentally metaphorical. The participants at the rabbinic table who recite "Blessed are you God . . . who brings forth bread from the earth" know very well that the bread in front of them was not exactly put there in its present form directly by God. As ben Zoma is said to have said, Blessed be the Discerner of Secrets and Blessed be Who created all these to serve me. How many labors labored Adam until he found his bread to eat: he ploughed and sowed and harvested and sheaved and threshed and winnowed and assorted (the ears) and ground and sifted (the flour) and kneaded and baked and only after all this he ate. But I rise and find all these prepared before me.[24]

This blessing is ostensibly an expression of gratitude to God for the progress and complexity of civilization and division of labor when one sees a big crowd of people, and may or may not have been uttered in the setting of a meal. Its reference to bread, and that immediately following it, is another saying of ben Zoma about what good and bad guests say to their hosts, suggest a meal setting as a possibility.[25] In any case, it certainly shows that sages at a rabbinic table were quite aware that God both did and did not "bring forth the bread" on the table in front of them directly "from the earth."

I don't mean to imply here that all "God talk" at the table is metaphorical and therefore mythic, because supernatural beings don't really exist (at least, not in the minds of critical outside observers of religious phenomena). Rather, there is also something to be said for the Eliade's understanding of myth as stories where the actors are supernatural beings, especially stories about the creation of how things now originally came to be *ab illo tempore*.[26] That's certainly applicable to the language of early rabbinic blessings, which as we've just seen, specifically refer to God's presence and involvement with what's served and who's being fed at the table. So to say the words "Blessed are you YHWH God who brings forth bread from the earth" and "who creates the fruit of the vine," "Blessed is YHWH our God from whose [table] we have eaten" (from *birkat hazimmun*, the "blessing of invitation to the grace after meals), or "Blessed are you YHWH our God who has sanctified us by his commandments and commanded us and taken pleasure

in us, and made his holy Sabbath our possession out of love and favor, a remembrance of the work of creation . . . [and] the Exodus from Egypt . . . (from the Sabbath eve Kiddush)" is not only to talk about God's ongoing and past activity in general, but refer it to the specific things, places, and times that right now occasion their utterance. Even though these specific words of blessing were not necessarily fixed,as Tannaitic disputes over wording suggest, they were orally composed improvisations of certain basic syntactical formulae employed by the early rabbinic sages.[27]

And as later medieval commentators pointed out, even the syntax of the blessings teach something important about the way human beings experience God. In particular, the typical shift from the second-person singular "You" of the first part of blessings for performing a commandment: "Blessed are You Lord" [*barukh atah Adonai*] to the third person singular in the second part: "who commanded us by His commandments [*asher kidshanu be-mitzvotav*]" . . . "reminds us how God is both visible and invisible. God is visible through His actions and their effects in the world, but who He is in and of Himself we cannot see or know."[28] So, in a sense, even the syntactical formulation of rabbinic blessings themselves is metaphorical, stating that God is both visibly present and not present at one's table as one eats what, when, and how God commanded one to eat.[29]

It seems that this "is/is not" awareness is quite important to the Tannaitic rabbis' own conceptualization of how their sacred myths of the Torah are to be deployed at meals. I would label this the "*ke-ilu* (as if) experience," after the expression used in two of the most well-known early rabbinic statements on how one is to experience "words of Torah" at a meal:

> In every generation a person should view himself as if (*ke-ilu*) he himself went out of Egypt[30]

and

> if three have eaten at one table and have spoken over it words of the Torah, it is as if (*ke-ilu*) they had eaten from the table of the

> Omnipresent, for it is written (Ezekiel 41.22) "He said to me, 'This is the table which is before the LORD.'"[31]

In this way, whether one sings or says these words of Torah, it is not either a "reenactment" or a "recollection" of rabbinic myths—it is both/and. The separate awareness of the "past-ness" and "present-ness" is fused into single experience, prompted especially by specific visual cues provided by the food, drink, activities, and company at the table. It's the early rabbinic performance of the sympotic convention of the *fait divers*, the self-conscious use of a notable thing or event at the table to provoke an appropriate table conversation.

Demonstrative pronouns in what one actually says play a particularly crucial role connecting the past-ness of the story to the present-ness of the meal being experienced by the participants, though sometimes nonverbal cues can have the same effect.[32] In "the four questions" immediately preceding R. Gamaliel's "answer," that is, his instructions to say *pesah, matzah*, and *maror* at the Passover seder, a father provides a script of questions that accentuate the demonstrative. "Why is this night different from all other nights? . . . on this night it's all *matzah*, . . . on this night *maror*, . . . on this this night it's all roasted meat [i.e., the *pesah* lamb], . . . on this night [we dip] twice." (m. Pesah. 10:4). Likewise, Rabban Gamaliel's talking points: "Whoever has not said these words/things [*devarim*] on Passover . . . These are them [*ve-aylu hen*]: *Pesah, matzah, maror*." To each of these things immediately present at the table in word or in fact one is to attach verbally a scriptural verse or allusion to the past Passover story:

> Pesah—because the Omnipresent "skipped over [*pasah*] the houses" of our fathers (Ex 12:27); *matzah*—because our fathers were redeemed in Egypt (Deut 16:3); *maror*—because the Egyptians "embittered [*mereru*] the lives" of our fathers in Egypt . . . as it is said, "you shall tell your child on that day, saying, because of this that YHWH did for me when I went out of Egypt."[33]

The paronomasia of words in the scriptural allusions with names of the items at the table "*pesah* [the verb]/*pesah* [the noun], "

yatzah mi-mitzraim/matzah," and "*mereru/maror*" even further bridges the conceptual gap between the past and present Passovers. I hear and see them as the same things even though I am also aware on some level they are not.

There is a kind of "associative thinking" encouraged here, what the medieval Jewish table conversationalist R. Bahya ben Asher describes as both "*mekavnin et mahshevato u-meshotettet*" ("directing one's thought and having it ramble about"),[34] and what the modern scholar of midrash Marc Bregman would call "midrash as visualization."[35] Bregman's remarks here are particularly apt:

> The process of midrashic visualization may be pictured as a kind of double move, from the scriptural sub-text to the mental image and from that image to the resultant midrashic text. Perhaps for this reason, the relatively ephemeral stage of mental imaging, which connects two more concrete textual expressions, has hitherto received relatively little scholarly attention. The problematic relation of the visual to the verbal might profitably be compared to what Freud described as the primary and secondary processes of the human psyche (what Jung referred to as the distinction between fantasy and directed thinking). The former, which is particularly characteristic of the original content of dreams, is more immediately visual, condensed and symbolic[,] while the latter is more logical, narrative and cognitive. Such directed thinking is employed in the secondary stage of translating the dream images into thoughts that can be expressed verbally.[36]

While Bregman refers here to midrash taught in the rabbinic *bet midrash*, or to the literary texts in which those midrashim are preserved, what he says applies to midrash over the table as well, and even more so.

The scriptural passages spoken at the table not only themselves evoke the visual demonstratives that we have just discussed, but they also tell us to look at what and who is at the table. We have an even larger set of mental images at play, those prompted by the scriptural passages, those prompted by the sight of the food, drink, and company, at the table, and those prompted through the other senses—the tastes, smells, sounds, the physical feelings of hunger and satisfaction experienced

at the table. The single setting of the table provides a dream-like experience of "condensed, symbolic, immediately visual" images, and I would add gustatory, olfactory, auditory, and palpable "images" as well. Perhaps this is the real implication of the description of revelation at Mt. Sinai in Exodus 24:11: *ve-yehezu et ha-elohim veyokhlu vayishtu* ("they dreamed God and they ate and drank").[37] Thus, I conclude that this sort of "fixing and rambling of the mind's eye" back and forth between Torah verses said, things done, and things seen at the table, this sort of "associative thinking" is the characteristically rabbinic, midrashic way of deploying myth at the dinner table. This kind of performance of midrash at the table is the distinctively mythic "mode of paying attention" (to borrow J. Z. Smith's term) in early rabbinic table rituals.

Notes

1. Concerning the Therapeutae see chapters 6–9 in this volume,.
2. Jane Ellen Harrison, *Themis: A Study of the Social Origins of Greek Religion* (New York, Cambridge University Press, 2010).
3. Ninian Smart, *Worldviews: Crosscultural Explorations of Human Beliefs* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2000); Victor Turner, *Social Dramas: Structure and Anti-Structure* (New York: de Gruyter, 1969).
4. Smart, *Worldviews*, 78. But see Graham Harvey, *Food, Sex and Strangers: Understanding Religion as Everyday Life* (Durham, NC: Acumen, 2013), who rightly criticizes the use of "the sacred" as a noun synonymous with a generic sort of ineffable *experience,* as Rudolf Otto does. Harvey says, "If 'sacred' should not be used as a noun, its traditional use as an adjective remains potent. While we need not accept that there are sacred people, places, times and things, we will fail to understand some of the dynamics that could be definitive of religion if we do not appreciate that others do accept such matters." So when I refer to the rabbinic Jewish "traditional use" of the adjectival and verbal forms of *kadesh,* "to make something holy," in what follows, it is in that spirit.
5. Lawrence A. Hoffman, *Beyond the Text: A Holistic Approach to Liturgy*; Jewish Literature and Culture (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987), 75–102, interprets "sacred myth" as *narrative texts* performed and applied in a Jewish liturgical context, the Passover seder, similarly. And see also Harvey,

especially 163–166, for other examples of Jewish performances that categorize things as holy or not using food and texts.

6. See ensuing paragraph.
7. See Sallie McFague, *Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1982), for this "is/is not" formulation as a way of speaking theologically.
8. Indeed, modern critical understandings of "belief" as a static state of consciousness, or the inflated importance given to it for understanding religion have been challenged recently by folklorists such as Sabina Magliocco, "Beyond Belief: Context, Rationality and Participatory Consciousness," *Western Folklore*, 71 no.1 (2012): 5–24; Linda Dégh, *Legend and Belief: Dialectics of a Folklore Genre* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2001); and religious studies scholars such as Graham Harvey, *Food, Sex and Strangers: Understanding Religion as Everyday Life* (Durham: Acumen, 2013), and the research he cites.
9. Marc Bregman, "Aqedah: Midrash as Visualization," *Journal of Textual Reasoning* 2, no.1 (2003).
10. Jonathan Brumberg-Kraus, "Communal Meals. II. Judaism," *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009).
11. Bahya ben Asher Hlava, "Second Gate" in Brumberg-Kraus trans, *Shulhan Shel Arba*, http://acadblogs.wheatoncollege.edu/jbk/. For Hebrew see Charles Chavel, ed., *Kitve Rabenu Bahya*, (Jerusalem: Mosad ha Rav Kuk, 1964), 493.
12. Nigel Savage and Anna Stevenson, *Food for Thought: Hazon's Curriculum on Jews, Food & Contemporary Life.* (New York: Hazon, 2007).
13. From Ps.104:14.
14. From Ex 12:27.
15. From Ex 1:14.
16. See chapter 1.
17. Joseph Tabory, *Pesah Dorot: Perakim be-Toldot Lel Ha-Seder* (Tel Aviv: ha-Kibutsha-meuhad, 1996), 314.
18. Ruth Fredman Cernea, *The Passover Seder: Afikoman in Exile* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981), 95
19. Baruch M.Bokser, *The Origins of the Seder: The Passover Rite and Early Rabbinic Judaism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 84–85.
20. Smart, *Worldviews*, 75.
21. Lawrence A. Hoffman, *Beyond the Text: A Holistic Approach to Liturgy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 91–92, suggests some sort of midrash on Deut. 26:5–8 predates its

inclusion in the rabbinic Passover seder liturgy as we know it, but does not specify whether it may have originated in the Bet Midrash or in discussions occurring at rabbinic Passover meals. Klein, Torah in Triclinia" provides persuasive evidence that rabbinic meals were the context for the some *midrash halakhah*, legal interpretation and application of Torah. See Klein, Torah in Triclinia" and chapter 1 in this volume.

22. James C. Livingston, *Anatomy of the Sacred: An Introduction to Religion* (London: Pearson, 2008), 87 (referring to theologian McFague's discussion of metaphor).
23. *Shulhan Shel Arba* (Chavel, *Kitve Rabenu Bahya*, 457.)
24. *t. Ber.* 6:5 and parallels in *b. Ber* 58a and *y. Ber* 13c, IX.2, cited by Henry A. Fischel, *Rabbinic Literature and Greco-Roman Philosophy* (Leiden: Brill, 1973), 52.
25. Fischel, *Rabbinic Literature and Greco-Roman Philosophy*, 52.
26. Livingston, *Anatomy of the Sacred*, 87
27. Joseph Heineman, *Hatefilah* (Jerusalem: Magness Press, 1964).
28. *Shulhan Shel Arba* (Chavel, *Kitve Rabenu Bahya*, 467). There is no actual subject in the second part of these blessings except the one implied in the verb. Examples of blessings over commandments are the Sabbath Kiddush, and the blessings before washing hands before a meal, and before eating *matzah* or *maror* at the Passover seder). In medieval Hebrew, the grammatical term for the form of third person verbs is *nistar*, literally, "hidden."
29. In R. Bahya's medieval Hebrew, the grammatical term for the form of third person verbs is *nistar*, literally, "hidden."
30. *m. Pes* 10.4.
31. *m. Avot* 3:3.
32. Hoffman, *Beyond the Text*, 93–94, also calls attention to demonstrative pronouns *zeh* (this) or *ayleh* (these) as formal stylistic features of the midrashic exegetical texts or oral traditions from the rabbinic academies that were redeployed liturgically in the rabbinic seder. That is, "*this* verse or word refers to . . . , *as it is written* . . . " I take it one step further by suggesting that the demonstratives are not only pointing to other illuminating texts, but also to material objects at the table.
33. *m. Pes* 10:5; see Albeck, ed., 3:178, see esp. n5.
34. Brumberg-Kraus, "The Ritualization of Scripture, 4, referring to what R. Bahya says in *Shulhan Shel Arba* (Chavel, *Kitve Rabenu Bahya*, 496):And thus it is necessary that when one eats, he direct his thought [*mahshevato*]and that it ramble about [*meshotetet*] the Holy One Blessed Be He over each andevery bite according to the matter of 'they envisioned God and they ate anddrank.' [Ex 24:11]

35. Bregman, "Aqedah: Midrash as Visualization," Full citation is now in note #9.
36. Bregman, "Aqedah: Midrash as Visualization."
37. See Brumberg-Kraus, "'Real Eating:' A Medieval Spanish Jewish View," where I discuss R. Bahya's midrash on this verse. He basically equates "words of Torah over the table" with a prophetic visionary experience of God (the *hazon* ["vision"] implied in the verb *ve-yehezu*) that is so palpable you could "eat it and drink it," an example of *akhilah vada'it* ("real eating").

SECTION II

CHAPTER 6

The Pivotal Place of the Therapeutae in Understanding the Meals of Early Judaism

Hal Taussig

Philo's portrait of the meals of the Therapeutae plays a crucial role in this book's examination of early Jewish meals and their social formation. Although almost completely ignored by Jewish studies of the past century and, at the same time, treated as something other than a Jewish meal by a number of studies in both classics and Christian studies, this text provides a wealth of information on Jews at table in this formative period.

While anticipating the other essays on this text in the book, I provide in this introduction an overview of the crucial role of the Therapeutae meal in this larger volume. There are four reasons presented here for Philo's portrait to be understood as crucial for this book: (1) it is probably the most extensive, continuous portrait of Jews at table in all of early Judaism; (2) it is key evidence for the case made by the contributors of this volume that early Jewish meals fit the main patterns of Greek and Roman meals; (3) it clearly affirms the integral relationship between these meals and the traditions of Israel; and (4) it is beautifully accessible to the ways ritual theory has been used to help understand the meals of early Judaism in the past 20 years of scholarship.

First of all, the text itself, a portion of Philo's longer work, *On the Contemplative Life,* is one of, if not, *the* most extensive description(s) of meal practices of first-century Judaisms. This long description opens up primarily with an extended review of Greek and Roman banquets in general in comparison/contrast to those of the Therapeutae.[1] Here, as is considered in Jonathan Brumberg-Kraus's essay in this volume, the primary point is to laud the practices of the Therapeutae in contrast to the alleged excesses of the Greek and Roman meals and to illustrate the rigorous asceticism of the Therapeutae meals.[2] In addition, Philo treats extensively the order of these meals, the leadership, the topics discussed, the music and dance included in the evening, the clothing of those gathered, the ways the feasting men and women join and are separated, the lack of slaves at the meal, the amounts and character of the food, the various moods of the different sections of the evening, the innovative order and justification of their reclining, sympathetic comparisons between these meals and practice of sacrifice.[3]

Philo's picture of these meals is rooted in the first century far more clearly than most of the proto-rabbinic and rabbinic materials sometimes used to portray early Jewish meals. These meals of the Therapeutae are also far more thickly portrayed than anything in the Jesus or Christ movements of the first century, which have been far more intensely studied.[4] Curiously, it has been classics departments and early Christian scholarship that have studied to some extent the Therapeutae meals without much reference at all to the fact that this is clearly portrayed as a specific practice of Judaism. In ironic complementarity, Jewish scholarship of the past century has focused so heavily on the somewhat later rabbinic meals revolution that Philo's portrait rarely receives more than a footnote. Because of this documentary prominence of the Therapeutae group practice for understanding early Jewish meals, the accompanying Christian and classics scholarship's curious overlooking that the Therapeutae and Philo were Jewish, and the lack of significant Jewish studies, this book gathers a set of essays on this portrait of the meals of an otherwise unknown Jewish meal practice in first-century Egypt.[5]

As this significant writing is recognized, it is equally important to note that just as is the case of the meal descriptions of the first-century gospel writers and Paul, Philo's extended portraiture of the Therapeutae meal practice cannot be taken as either actual historical data or even a straightforward imagination of such an actual group. A significant number of scholars still doubt the existence of the Therapeutae,[6] and most studies of this section of *On the Contemplative Life* have found it laced with hyperbole, rhetorical, and ideological interests, and literary idealizations. So, our identification of this text as significant for the study of early Jewish meals must observe the same careful literary and historical critique that the likes of Plutarch and the early gospels have undergone in scholarly treatment.

The second major reason to look closely at the Therapeutae meals as significant for the study of early Jewish meals is how closely Philo's portrait fits the new Greek and Roman meal typology for all Mediterranean festive meals from 200 BCE to 200 CE established in the scholarship of Dennis Smith and Matthias Klinghardt. The work of the Society of Biblical Literature's Consultation, Seminar, and Section of "Meals in the Greco-Roman World" for more than a decade in the early 2000s has now established and elaborated this meal typology for almost all meals—including Jewish meals—of that 400-year period.[7]

As the studies of a wide range of publications of the SBL meals seminar have asserted, early Jewish meals by and large also followed the structure of the Greek and Roman paradigm.[8] The ways this was (and was not) the case are treated thoroughly in this book, and given additional nuance and complexity.[9] But once the Jewish character of the Therapeutae is accepted and studied, this text becomes a primary example of the relationship between Jewish festive meal practice and the Greek and Roman paradigm, exhibited perhaps most eloquently in Philo's effort to show how much better the Therapeutae festivities are.[10]

The third aspect of this treatment of the Therapeutae that has significance for study of early Jewish meals is its thorough affirmation of the relationship between these meals and the traditions of Israel. That the traditions of Israel were observed in

the early Common Era by at least as many people outside of geographical Israel as within those boundaries is now generally recognized.[11] And similarly, that Egypt had one of, if *the* largest populations of adherents to the traditions of Israel in the first and second centuries CE is also acknowledged.[12] Philo's overall work and this particular treatment in *On the Contemplative Life* need to be considered within these larger assumptions of the importance of this particular meals text.

The traditions around Moses loom especially large in this text. In 63 the Therapeutae belong to a larger assertion about the difference between the Greeks and "the students of Moses." In 64 the feasts of the Therapeutae are portrayed as "According to the sacred instructions of the prophet Moses." In 70 the praise for the lack of slaves at these meals resonates strongly with the Torah portraits of Israel's ancient enslavement in Egypt. In 78 "the whole of the law" is invoked in direct relationship to the teaching and discussion at the meal. In 87 an extended description of the meal proceedings are based on the portrait of the people of Israel being delivered by their passage through the Red Sea under the guidance of "God, the Savior . . . , Moses the prophet . . . , and Miriam, the prophetess." And in 88 the Therapeutae's meals are presented to be base on the model of the Exodus.

Other traditions of Israel with significant role in Philo's portrait of the feast include: (1) an extended comparison between these meals and the practice of sacrifice in the Jerusalem temple; (2) a significant, intermittent, and complicated description of Therapeutae meals "on the seventh day," with possible substantive reference to Shabbat practice; or (3) relationship to the feast of Shavuot (65–66).[13]

The fourth significance of this text for the study of early Jewish meals has to do with application of recent ritual theory to what has often been seen as a kind of Philonic hyperbolic literary style. Here I propose that while it is almost certainly the case that Philo's style uses hyperbole in his rhetorical strategy of contrast between the Greeks and the Therapeutae, recent application of ritual theory to this text also helps place Philo's portrait within a larger understanding of the Therapeutae meal as negotiation of important social issues facing this group.

The primary elaboration of this ritual theory approach to Greek and Roman meals occurs in my *In the Beginning Was the Meal: Social Experimentation and Early Christian Identity*, which studies the intersection of significant social issues of the first two centuries CE, twentieth -and twenty-first–century ritual theory, and the emerging paradigmatic structure of the Greek and Roman meal.[14] Consulting five particularly recognized ritual theorists,[15] I proposed that "Ritual is, in this framework, a kind of social intelligence, often reserved for subject matter that has proved too complex for individual discernment, too frightening for more direct address, or attached to vying long-term social loyalties. Whether it is the complex relationship between a giver and a receiver; the rivalry between an Israelite king and the high priest; the conflicts inherent in the geographical location and the social trends of Algerian ethnicity; the contradiction of the simultaneous benefits and harmfulness of Ndembu hierarchy; or the class distinctions in modern democratic society; ritual is a primary way groups of people 'perform' an approach to these relatively intractable issues. They do, however, in their performative address to these complex issues give perspective on and allow thought about the difficult issues."[16] What resulted from this study was "the creative practice of meals themselves, showing that they are not incidental to the social dynamics of the Hellenistic era, but rather a key dynamic in negotiating certain key social issues of Mediterranean society."[17] Philo's portrait of the Therapeutae telegraphs just such complex, implicit, and semiconscious ritual negotiation of what it means to be a Jew in Egypt. His prologue to the description of the powerful (and hyperbolically described) virtues of the Therapeutaes' meals goes to great lengths to talk about the excesses and improprieties of the meals that the Greeks and Romans hold. In other words, it is clear to Philo that the expressive and disciplined character of the Therapeutae conviviality is complexly tied to and in competition with the Greek and Roman dining to which it is so closely related in form. The Therapeutaes' meals negotiate this larger complex identity of Jewishness in highly Hellenized Egypt.

In Philo's portrait of the meals of the Therapeutae, a series of seeming hyperbole exist. Here I list only some of those that make up his "description" of the banquets themselves:

> After the prayers the elders recline in accordance with the order of their admission: for they regard as elders not those who are rich in years and of silvery brow . . . but those who from their earliest years have spent the prime of their youth and the flower of their maturity in the contemplative branch of philosophy, which is indeed the most beautiful and most godlike part. (67)
>
> The women, too, take part in the feast: most of them are aged virgins who have maintained their purity not under constraint . . . The placement is so apportioned that the men recline apart on the right, and the women apart on the left. (68–69)
>
> They use no slaves to serve their needs, since they consider the possession of servants to be entirely contrary to nature. (70)
>
> Then the president rises and sings a hymn composed in honor of the deity, either a new one of his own composition, or an old one by poets of an earlier age . . . After him the others too sing in their places and in proper order while all the rest listen in deep silence, except when they need to chant the choral refrains, for then they all sing out, men and women alike. (80)
>
> After the supper they hold the sacred vigil, which is celebrated in the following manner. They all rise up in a body and at the center of the refectory they first form two choirs, one of men, the other of women, the leader and precentor chosen for each being the most highly esteemed among them and the most musical. (83)
>
> Then when each choir has completed for itself its own part in the feasting, having drunk as in the Bacchic revelries of the strong wine of God's love, they mix, and the two choirs become one, a copy of the choir organized at the Red Sea on the occasion of the wonders wrought. (85)
>
> Thus they continue till dawn intoxicated with this exquisite intoxication and then, not with heavy head or drowsy eyes, but more alert than when they came to the banquet, they stand with their faces and whole body turned to the east, and when they behold the rising sun, with hands stretched heavenward they pray for a joyous day, truth, and acuity of thought. (89)

That each of these behaviors is outside the norm of regular daily behavior is obvious. To be determined is how much of this hyperbole is literary idealization by Philo and how much

belongs to what recent ritual theorists consider to be the way ritual behavior negotiates issues of social order. Here I summarize ways ritual behavior has been seen as intersecting with social ordering. Perhaps the most succinct proposal in this regard is what historian of religion, Jonathan Z. Smith, would call "ritual perfection."[18] Ritual in this way organizes action in such a way as to present a perfected behavior, which marks the difference between it and what happens outside the ritual behavior. What Smith means by this is that a major dynamic of rituals themselves is to portray within the constructed environment of a ritual a kind of ideal behavior that stands in contrast to normal social behavior. This, for Smith, is at the heart of ritual. The contrast between the "perfected" actions of the ritual and the normal patterns of day-to-day reality make people think about those differences, Smith says. His classic illustration is that of the Siberian people who raise a tamed bear cub until it is fully grown and then slaughter it and eat it, as a contrast to the many normal difficulties of bear hunting in Siberia.

In this way, ritual negotiates new possibilities for social order. As J. Z. Smith says, ritual "provides the means for demonstrating that we know what ought to have been done, what ought to have taken place . . . Ritual provides an occasion for reflection and rationalization on the fact that what ought to have been done was not done, what ought to have taken place did not occur."[19] Social philosopher Pierre Bourdieu's consideration of the relationship between ritual and "habitus" points to similar dynamics. The works of Catherine Bell and Ronald Grimes also address ways that ritual works on disjunctions between ceremonial actions and the larger social frameworks. Sociologist Mary Douglas has applied this kind of thinking to meals themselves, showing factors like arrangement of seating, the kinds of food offered to various persons, and the order of foods served, all are ritual behavior meant to shape social order far beyond the meal itself.

Ritual theory then poses a question for our observation of Philonic hyperbole: How much are the actions of the Therapeutae, portrayed by Philo, exaggerated? How much are they ritual perfections? The portrait of women reclining at the banquet of

the Therapeutae implies ritual negotiation of the social order relative to issues of gender, power, participation, and privilege. I have made a similar and much more extended argument for women reclining, sitting, or being excluded at meals in other (especially proto-Christian) texts being an indication of one or another kind of ritual perfection. Part of that conclusion that applies to this discussion of the Therapeutae picture of women at meals is: "Women reclining or sitting at early Christian meals provided occasion for ritual reflection and perfection about the role of women in larger society. The increasing frequency with which women in Jewish, Christian, and gentile settings reclined or sat at meals helped people imagine and reflect on other issues of women's leadership and presence outside the meal."[20] Philo's elaborate description of the women's eloquent participation and even leadership in the Therapeutae meals could not be a closer example of the way meals in this era helped both men and women negotiate the larger societal tension around women's public presence and leadership.

Pursuit of this example highlights the possibilities that this text from Philo does reflect ritual perfection and not just literary idealization. Key here are the numerous passages throughout his work in which Philo makes clear that he does not approve of women's leadership or participation in public life, philosophical reflection, or ceremonial actions. This seems to rule out the possibility that here Philo is literarily idealizing the Therapeutae, since the dramatic inclusion of women in the banquet violates his own values stated throughout his literary corpus.

Rather, this seems to be a clear case of ritual perfection. In a culture where women's public appearance without male companionship and women's leadership is often contested, the active leadership and participation of women at the heart of the Therapeutae banquet seems to be a ritual negotiation of social reordering.[21] To paraphrase Jonathan Z. Smith: that women's leadership in the larger society beyond the meal order ought to have taken place is actively contemplated through their ritual inclusion in the banquet.

How much can this example of ritual perfection be extended to other hyperbolic actions in Philo's treatise? Can this be the

case with the lack of servants? Discussing a wide range of similar texts in the first-century Christ movement texts in *In the Beginning Was the Meal*, I suggest ways to consider meals in which mutuality between slave owners, slaves, and free persons like that of the Therapeutae might be seen as negotiation of these complex relationships and ways to think about them even beyond the meal: "The complex relationships, for instance, among slaves, slave owners and free persons were 'perfected' along the lines of the Hellenistic values of mutuality and friendship with the meal. The meal became a place in which slaves could be president of the association, and owners, slaves, and free persons could recline together in generous friendship, whereas outside the ritualized meal setting a much more rigid hierarchy among the same people was the rule. At the same time, the meals reproduced social boundaries and stratification in the ways of the hierarchy of reclining according to honorable societal status."[22] Here too the portrait of the Therapeutae's meals is eloquent in its ritual addressing the dilemmas of social status, as it emphatically points to the way everyone served one another and there were no outside servants or slaves. From the viewpoint of ritual theory, this is not so much an extolling of the Therapeutae virtue as it is yet another example of how the ritual dimensions of their meals help them work on the larger intractable issues around slavery in the Greco-Roman contexts.

What about the description of the honored places at the banquet going not necessarily to those who are oldest, but rather to those who are most spiritually mature? What about the dramatic character of the beautiful singing, so perfectly harmonized and often spontaneously created on the spot? What about the eloquence of the president in expounding upon the scriptures? And the singing all night until the musical prayer to the dawn?

It is obvious that sorting the literary idealization from the ritual perfection in all of these cases would take longer than is possible in this short chapter. This text as a whole obviously reflects some of both. Although, for instance, the eloquence of the president and the perfect harmony of the choirs seem

more likely candidates for literary idealization, while the lack of servants and the unusual ranking of those reclining is more interesting as possible ritual perfection, it seems unlikely that we will be able to decide definitively between literary idealization and ritual perfection for all these dramatic contrasts to the expected practices of quotidian life.

For the purposes of this overview of the importance of Philo's portrait of the Therapeutae meals, this fourth vector shows how this Philonic text can be seen as a fairly extended set of snapshots in which Jewish meals act ritually to negotiate a variety of social issues in the lives of those gathered, thereby completing the major benefits of the text for the larger topic of early Jewish meals.

This Jewish text located both in the haunted land of Egypt and in one of the most eloquent sites of Greek civilization of the first century needs to be claimed as one of early Judaism's articulations of identity through the ritual power of eating together. The complex, yet powerful, negotiation of social formation by these Egyptian Jews' meals stands in important continuum with the eventual centrality of food and meals in later Rabbinic Judaism, even while plotting a strikingly different course. A full understanding of the meals of early Judaism and their social formational eloquence is impossible to understand without this substantial text. Too much articulated early Jewish identity is lost if one only thinks teleologically about the eventual Rabbinic resolves about eating. The lively meals of the Therapeutae remain imaginally representative of both major parts of early Judaism's meals and the flourishing of a range of Jewish identities during this fertile period.

Notes

1. Commonly referred to as "On the Contemplative Life," or *De Vita Contemplativa*. In the major manuscripts there is a subtitle "The fourth (treatise) concerning virtues." It is also sometimes referred to as "Suppliants." Where quoted here, unless otherwise noted, we have used the translation of Joan Taylor, *Jewish Women Philosophers of First-Century Alexandria: Philo's "Therapeutae" Reconsidered* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).
2. Brumberg-Kraus, chapter 9 in this volume.

3. The section on the Therapeutae meals is over 8,000 words in length.
4. It is my understanding that every first-century document of the early Jesus and Christ movements thought of themselves as "Jewish" in one way or another. That is, I see all first-century "Christianity" as belonging to what I have termed "spiritual Israel," by which I mean an approximate equivalent to Jacob Neusner's term "Judaisms" of the first century. In this, I follow other more recent scholarship by Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press; and *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity* (Philadelphia, PA: Pennsylvania Press, 2004).
5. As exceptions to Jewish studies, general hesitance to consider the Therapeutae, cf. the work of Kraemer in her chapter on the Therapeutae in Ross S. Kraemer, *Unreliable Witnesses: Religion, Gender, and History in the Greco-Roman Mediterranean* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011) as well as Taylor's *Jewish Women Philosophers.*
6. Cf., for instance, the way the esteemed researcher of such questions, Kraemer, has reversed fields and now leans toward more skepticism on whether *On the Contemplative Life* provides any real reliable material on Jewish women of that day. She makes the case that the Therapeutae may have well been literary idealizations by Philo rather than actual women. Kraemer, *Unreliable Witnesses: Religion, Gender, and History.* This argumentation has been recently disputed by Taylor's *Jewish Women Philosophers.*
7. Indeed, this book is the second of three anticipated works from the SBL Meals in the Greco-World program units to be published by Palgrave Macmillan. The first of these studies was the 2012 volume, *Meals in the Early Christian World: Social Formation, Experimentation, and Conflict at the Table.* Cf. also my own book, *In the Beginning Was the Meal.*
8. Cf. the complex ways this is discussed throughout this volume. For instance, the ten theses concerning meals in early Judaism elaborated in chapter 1 provide a nuanced overview. It may also be the case that the coherence between Philo's portrait of the Therapeutae and the Greek and Roman meal typology is among the reasons that this text has been overlooked by leading scholars of early Rabbinic Judaism, since both this Greek and Roman adherence and Philo's larger program of integrating Platonist philosophy and the traditions of Israel could be seen as reasons (at least retrospectively) to discount it as authentic Judaism.

9. Cf., for instance, the discussions of comparisons and contrast between Jewish meals and the larger pattern of Greek and Roman dining in this volume on the significance of reclining (Hauptman, chapter 2) and the grace after meals (Marks, chapter 4).
10. See, especially, the studies of Klinghardt, chapter 8, and Brumberg-Kraus, chapter 9, in this volume, on the broader comparisons of the Greek and Roman paradigm to the array of Jewish meals. Klinghardt's extensive study includes a massive study of Philo's text itself, while Brumberg-Kraus has studied the ways emerging Seder practices of that era relate to the Greek and Roman practices.
11. Margaret Williams, *The Jews among the Greeks and Romans: A Diasporan Sourcebook* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 137, 201, 338; Steven Bowman, "Jewish Diaspora in the Greek World," in *Encyclopedia of Diasporas: Immigrant and Refugee Cultures Around the World,* ed., M. Ember, C. R. Ember and I. A. Skoggard, 192–201 (New York: Springer, 2005).
12. Williams, *Jews among the Greeks and Romans*, 225–237.
13. Cf. McGowan, chapter 7, and Klinghardt, chapter 8 in this volume
14. Cf. particularly chapters 4, 6, 7, and 8.
15. Catherine Bell, Pierre Bourdieu, Mary Douglas, Jonathan Z. Smith, and Victor Turner.
16. Hal Taussig, *In the Beginning Was the Meal: Social Experimentation and Early Christian Identity,* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2009), 66.
17. Taussig, *In the Beginning Was the Meal,* 84–85.
18. Taussig, *In the Beginning Was the Meal,* 67.
19. J.Z. Smith, *To Take Place*: *Toward Theory in Ritual* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 63.
20. Taussig, *In the Beginning Was the Meal*, 162. The entire argument is found on pages 151–155.
21. Cf. the earlier cited contrasting arguments of Ross K. Kraemer and Joan Taylor on this point.
22. Taussig, *In the Beginning Was the Meal*, 68.

CHAPTER 7

The Food of the Therapeutae: A Thick Description

Andrew McGowan

Introduction

If the Therapeutae really did exist, and if they shared their observer and interpreter Philo of Alexandria's preference for intellectual treasure over the dross of sense-perception, they might have been expected to set their minds on higher things than food.[1] Yet the meals of the community, food included, are central to Philo's description in his work *De Vita Contemplativa*.

Philo's accounts of the *symposia* of the group amount to a sort of ancient "thick description," since he attends to space, posture, ritual, discourse, and numerous other details of the meals.[2] Within these, foods are more than merely incidental or of minimal importance. The food and drink described are certainly austere, yet their simplicity is a sign of robust and coherent ascetic sensibility, not of indifference to the material. The meal, food included, reveals and underlies the character of the community and its life.

The Food of the Therapeutae: Three Accounts

The diet of the Therapeutae is described three times in Philo's treatise, with basic consistency, along with some variation in detail and emphasis.

The first and briefest account is part of a general description of the life and habits of the community, a brief ethnography as it were, within which diet is given an expected place along with their working habits, clothing, etc. After indicating that the ascetics do not eat or drink before sunset, and that some feast so fully on wisdom that they may forego food for three or even six days, Philo says that "they do not eat anything expensive, but plain bread with a seasoning (*opson*) of salt which the more extravagant flavor with hyssop (*usoppos*). Drink for them is running water [from a stream or spring]" (37).

The second description of the contemplatives' diet comes during Philo's extended account of their *symposium*, which follows a critical discussion of the famous banquets known among the Greeks. Unsurprisingly, Philo draws a specific contrast regarding the use of wine:

> Wine is not brought in on those days, but [only] the most translucent water. [It is] cold for most of them, but warm for the weaker of the seniors. The table is also free from meat [*hoi enaimoi*- lit. "bloody things"], and upon it [are] loaves of bread, along with a seasoning [*opson*] of salt. There is also hyssop as a relish, ready for those of a more delicate constitution. Just as right reason dictates abstinence from wine (*nephalia*) for priests when sacrificing, so also for these [people] for a lifetime, for wine is a drug of foolishness, and many expensive things to eat [just] stir up that most insatiable of all animals: desire. (73–74)

The third and final description is a variant on the second, again describing the details of the banquet; while Philo had followed the previous list of foods with a moralizing reflection about the effects on body and mind of what was avoided in the contemplatives' diet, now he adds an interpretation putting more positive emphasis on the foods that they did choose to eat:

> When each person has finished a hymn, the juniors bring in the table above-mentioned table, upon which the most all-pure food is [set out]: [loaves] of leavened bread, along with a seasoning of salt mingled with hyssop. This [arrangement] is in deference to the sacred table in the vestibule of the holy Temple sanctuary. For upon this [table] are loaves and salt, without flavouring, and

> the bread is unleavened, and the salt is not mixed.[3] For it was appropriate that the simplest and purest food be allotted to the most excellent portion of the priests, as a reward for services, while others would zealously seek the same [kind of food], but hold off from the [Temple loaves], in order that their betters might have precedence. (81–82)

So the actual food and drink of the meals of the Therapeutae are straightforward and consistently described: bread, water, salt, and herbs. These choices are marked by simplicity, morality, and, this third case, a sort of cultic humility. This last description, which draws complex connections with the food offerings of the Jerusalem Temple, requires more specific attention.

Bread, Salt, Herbs, Water

Bread (*artos*) could mean either leavened or unleavened loaves, but in the third report (81–82) Philo specifies that the bread is actually leavened. It is clear what salt and water are, if not necessarily what they are for.

The precise identity of the other element, "herbs," is uncertain. The word *ussopos* is used in the Septuagint to translate *boza*. This substance is mentioned in biblical texts, including its use for the daubing of the Israelites' doors with blood at Passover (Exod. 12:22), the burning of the red heifer (Num 19:6), and for purifications associated with skin disease (Lev. 14). An intended connection to the cultic and ritual practice of those biblical precedents via the Septuagint seems likely.

Yet Philo's "hyssop" is probably not the herb later known by that name (despite all published English translations of *De Vita Contemplativa*), that is, *Hyssopus officinalis*, but rather aromatic herbs such as those of the *origanum* group, which (as in parts of the Mediterranean today) may have served as something more like "salad" in the modern Western sense, or at least as garnishes, and not only as minor flavoring agents.[4]

The consistent presentation of the ascetics' bread as accompanied by "side dishes" or *opsa* salt and herbs—indicate that this is not just a list of foods, but a simple version of a meal, for ancient social and ritual purposes—bread, with accompanying

side dishes, or in older English "relishes." In Greek dining, it was the *opsa* served along with bread and wine, whose quantity and quality expressed the character of a banquet, and reflected the status, interests, and resources of the diners themselves.[5] Philo is therefore not merely listing the foodstuffs of the community as "diet," but reporting their prepared food arranged as "menu."

Meal and Meaning

Along with his three descriptions, Philo gives three different explanations or interpretations of the choice of food and drink by the Therapeutae.

In the first account, Philo's presentation of the general diet of the group is accompanied by an agonistic interpretation of their asceticism, with hunger and thirst as the enemies:

> For since nature has made hunger and thirst mistresses over us mortal types of people, they appease them away, not laying favour on them, but [eating and drinking] the necessary things without which life could not be [sustained]. On this account, they eat just so as not to be hungry, and they drink just so as not to be thirsty, avoiding [complete] satisfaction as an enemy and plotter against both soul and body. (37)

This explanation sits neatly with Philo's general thought concerning desire and pleasure. Hunger and thirst initially, and then also their opposites in satiety, are presented as adversaries of the philosopher. Philo presents bodily needs as despots, and dietary asceticism as a form of war against that domination, or at least of conscientious objection to it. The limited quantity of the foods is a model of ascetic moderation that supports this contemplative *détente*.

The two further accounts, which are linked with Philo's descriptions of the actual *symposium* of the community, offer somewhat different explanations of the diet. In the first (*Cont.* 73–74), Philo describes the preliminaries and preparations for the banquet. Two slightly different interpretations are interwoven even in this one section.

First, there is a more instrumental version of the earlier philosophical explanation for the dietary choices, centered now on the reality of the body and the physics of food; the ascetics choose water and bread because "wine is a drug of foolishness, and many expensive things to eat [just] stir up that most insatiable of all animals: desire" (73). This is similar to the earlier explanation regarding the impact of dietary choice on the body; but while the first account had emphasized quantitative moderation as a means to oppose desire, understood to exist inherently in the body, this version gives a more instrumental and qualitative picture of how different types of food give rise to different effects, and must be chosen accordingly. Philo now presents diet not so much as a matter of combat with the body or with desire, but as a technique, a recipe, or prescription for the management of the body in keeping with the philosophical life. While earlier he had emphasized how much one eats, here he notes the importance of what you eat: drinking wine and indulgence in seasoned foods give rise to desire, while consuming water and bread does not.

A different reason for these dietary choices also appears in the form of two rather subtle points in this second account of the contemplatives' food: First, Philo makes an aside about abstinence from wine being enjoined by right reason to these ascetics, just as to priests undertaking cultic duties. He uses the technical term *nephalia* in relation to this choice; it involves "abstinence from wine," but more than that it implies a purity and simplicity deemed appropriate for certain particular Greek and Roman offerings, notably to the Eumenides (Furies) and Nymphs.[6] Philo connects this hint at the idea of pure cultus, as part of an implied general theory of offerings, to the prescription in Leviticus (10:9) that priests not drink wine before entering the tabernacle. Second, Philo underlines the purity of the table laden with bread and salt by contrasting these elements with *hoi enamoi*, things with blood.

These comments both suggest that sacrifice is important for his understanding of the meal, yet in making them Philo also emphasizes the differences between actual sacrificial food and that of the Therapetuae. And although he invokes the idea of a

wineless existence proper to priesthood, wine was in fact consumed in the Temple cultus. It is "right reason," rather than real ritual, that is at issue here. Similarly, the absence of blood—the necessary corollary of ritual slaughter— renders these "offerings" pure, whereas in the actual cultus of the Jerusalem Temple blood purified the suppliant.

These arguments, or at least their implications, involve a Greek philosophical commonplace, in which the ascetic diet of the sage is contrasted with consumption of meat and wine, the main elements of the "cuisine of sacrifice."[7] For Philo however, the absence of those ambiguous sacrificial meal elements from the diet of the Therapeutae, along with the presence of others, creates a paradoxical form of cultic identification or comparison. Although they are somewhat unlike actual sacrificial foods, or even *because* they are unlike it, the bread, salt, herbs, and water of this community are pure and holy in a way that invokes the holiness of sacrifice and Temple.

A re-working of conventional understandings of the relationship between food and sacrifice continues in the third explanation of the ascetic meal, which is the most intriguing. Philo recounts, after the hymnody of the *symposium*, the bringing of tables with "*to panagestaton sition*," the most holy food. Then, however, he goes on to emphasize not the purity but the adulterated nature of both elements in the meal—the leavened character of the bread, and the mixture of the salt and herbs. These combinations are made "out of reverence for the sacred table in the Temple court," where *unleavened* bread and *unmixed* salt are placed.

The reference to salt in conjunction with the showbread of the Jerusalem Temple reflects the Septuagint version of Leviticus 24:7, but not the extant Hebrew text. In any case, Philo's point is that these mixtures—flour and leaven, salt and herbs—are made to distinguish these good and pure foods of the Therapeutae, otherwise comparable to those of the Temple, from the actual foods given to the priests. The two tables, in Egypt and Jerusalem, emphasize the homology, but the calculated impurity of the foods eaten by the contemplatives constitutes a culinary humility that befits their vocation and defers to the Temple and its sanctity.

Sacrifice and Symbol

While Philo uses both quantitative and qualitative accounts of food and drink in describing and explaining the ascetic diet, the curious cultic elements are the most intriguing aspect of his explanations.

As Joan Taylor and Philip Davies have pointed out, the description of the community in *De Vita Contemplativa* as a whole involves the juxtaposition of a "cultic" term—Therapeutae—with concerns that are more philosophical than sacrificial.[8] The food of the contemplatives itself presents the same tension; Philo uses images and ideas drawn from the Temple, or from ancient sacrifice generally, to present the diet of the philosophical Therapeutae as exemplary.

Yet the account of the contemplatives' food as "sacrificial" is difficult in ways beyond the awkward fit between any metaphor and its referent. While Philo describes the Therapeutae and their practice using cultic language,[9] sacrifice—even the system of sacrifices of the Jerusalem Temple—is not one idea or thing, but a field of meaning or discourse, a set of signifiers. To say that the meal is "cultic" does not therefore shed much light on it, beyond indicating a second system of signs that Philo uses to interpret the first, namely the life of the community itself. The real challenge is to discern just what choices, oppositions, connections, and exclusions are communicated and effected through this juxtaposition of cultic and philosophical practices.

Another Jewish example, from later rabbinic literature, concerns certain *pērushim* whose ascetic avoidances are at least partly related to the concerns of the Therapeutae:

> When the Temple was destroyed for the second time, large numbers in Israel became *pērushim*, binding themselves neither to eat meat nor to drink wine. R. Joshua got into conversation with them and said to them: My sons, why do you not eat meat nor drink wine? They replied: Shall we eat flesh which used to be brought as an offering on the altar, now that this altar is in abeyance? Shall we drink wine which used to be poured as a libation on the altar, but now no longer? He said to them: If that is so, we should not eat bread either, because the meal offerings have ceased. They said: we can manage with fruit. We should not eat fruit either [he said] because there is no longer an offering of first-fruits. Then we can

> manage with other fruits [they said]. But, [he said,] we should not drink water, because there is no longer any ceremony of the pouring of water. To this they could find no answer.[10]

While the ascetic diet of Philo's contemplatives works by creating connection and contrast with the existing Temple cultus, here the absence of the destroyed system of offerings seems to invite a more radical approach. Both cases, of course, foreground the consumption of meat and wine.

Philo's sacrificializing interpretation of the meal does not simply present it as inferior or superior to the food of the Temple itself—rather this is an elusive, perhaps guarded, or even playful, evocation of the sacred in relation to the food of the meal, without too clear or too concrete a definition of the relationship. The food is cultic, but is not.

Beyond this distinction concerning the cultic character of the Therapeutae food lies the obvious affirmation (but necessary, given the lack of attention to the Jewishness of the Therapeutae in the history of scholarship) that this food and those who eat it are Jewish. As noted throughout this essay, even in the distinctions that Philo's portrait makes between (1) the placement of food on the table by the Therapeutae and the Temple location, (2) the function of wine in the Temple and the lack of wine for the ascetic Therapeutae, (3) the food of the ascetics and that of the Temple, and (4) the role of the ascetic and that of the Temple priest, the author, in his description of Therapeutae practice, defers to the sanctity of the Jerusalem Temple. The consideration of parallels to Babylonian Talmud Baba Batra also indicates such connection to the larger sets of Jewish food practice throughout the Mediterranean both before and after the destruction of the Temple.

Thus, Philo's menu for his Therapeutae and Therapeutrides is on the one hand an ascetic response to bodily desire, which is to be harnessed or even opposed, and on the other hand an ambiguously sacrificialized meal, a quasi-cultic diet at once evocative of the food and drink of the temple and distinguished from them. Would these understandings really have been shared by the participants? This may be beside the point. If it happened, the symbolism of this meal, as of other ancient ascetic

banquets, involved a surplus of meaning inversely related to the quantity and simplicity of its food.

Notes

1. For two recent views on the Therapetuae and the scholarly construction thereof, see Troels Engberg-Pedersen, "Philo's *De vita contemplativa* as a Philosopher's Dream," *JSJ* 30 (1999): 40–64; Soham Al-Suadi, "Wechsel der Identitäten: Philos Therapeuten im Wandel der Wissenschaftsgeschichte," *Judaica* 66, no. 3 (2010): 209–228.
2. See Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward and Interpretive Theory of Culture," in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*, 3–30 (New York: Basic Books, 1973).
3. *Pace* Taylor's translation, I suggest Philo is not referring to any mixture of salt and bread (since none is referred to anyway), but indicates that the Temple salt offering is not mingled with any adulterant such as "hyssop" and hence distinguishable from the ascetics' meal.
4. F. G. Beetham and P. A. Beetham, "A Note on John 19: 29," *JTS* 44, no.1 (1993): 163–169.
5. James Davidson, "*Opsophagia*: Revolutionary Eating in Athens," in *Food in Antiquity,* ed. John Wilkins et al., 205 (Exeter: Exeter University Press, 1995).
6. See Folkert T. Van Straten, *Hierà Kalá: Images of Animal Sacrifice in Archaic and Classical Greece.* (Leiden: Brill 1995), 91–92.
7. Marcel Detienne, "Culinary Practices and the Spirit of Sacrifice," in *The Cuisine of Sacrifice among the Greeks*, ed. Marcel Detienne and Jean-Pierre Vernant, 1–20 (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1998)..
8. Joan E. Taylor and Philip R. Davies, "The So-Called Therapeutae of *De Vita Contemplativa*: Identity and Character," *Harvard Theological R*eview 91, no. 1 (1998): 3–24, esp. 6, 10.
9. Joan E. Taylor, *Jewish Women Philosophers of First-Century Alexandria: Philo's "Therapeutae" Reconsidered* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 54–73.
10. *b. B. Bat.* 60b, Trans I. Epstein.

CHAPTER 8

The Ritual Dynamics of Inspiration: The Therapeutae's Dance

Matthias Klinghardt

Philosophy and Dance: The Question

Embedded in the description of the Therapeutae's meal in his treatise *On the Contemplative Life*, Philo deals with their all-night festival (*pannychis*) every seventh week, which is the focus of his characterization of the Therapeutae. Although there is an ongoing debate over the question whether Philo is describing a real group or whether he is dreaming up a fictional ideal,[1] there can be no doubt that his description is highly idealized: the group living at Lake Mareotis, which is in the vicinity of Alexandria, is the elite of all Therapeutae (22).[2] Interestingly, Philo defines the religious identity of "these philosophers" (§ 2) with little mention of their beliefs or teachings: he only describes their ritual practice—putting it in contrast to the meals of others, thus drawing a "picture of thinkers without their thoughts."[3]

It is clear that this group is Jewish. Although Philo does not treat their "beliefs" per se in his description, there are a whole series of Jewish motifs, symbols, and images. The prominence of seven weeks of seven days, the location of the meal on the seventh day, the centrality of the flight from Egypt in their song, and the centrality of the study of scripture, the crossing of the Red sea in dance and song, Miriam's leadership at this

juncture, and the presentation of the scripture by the leader, all underscore the Jewishness of the group, even if it does not correspond to Judean second Temple or later Rabbinic practices. For the purposes of this book, it is important not to repeat the curious mutual ignoring of the Jewishness of the Therapeutae and Philo himself in both the way classical studies of Philo underplay his Jewishness and Rabbinic commentary ignores both Philo and the Therapeutae. The extended length of Philo's description of this group at a meal makes it one of the primary pieces of evidence of early meals in Judaism. Further, the way Philo leaves implicit the teaching at the meal attends to the dynamics of dance and song; and this attention connotes the texture of the Psalms with their evocation of dance and the prominence of singing.

The lack of explicit thought and belief systems is all the more noticeable as the Therapeutae's philosophical studies, which are mentioned several times (§ 25–31; 75–79), are their main occupation: individually confined to their houses, they spend six days a week philosophizing (§ 30). Small wonder that, when they meet on the seventh day and gather for their communal dinners, they rather enjoy listening to an erudite lecture of their president instead of eating the main courses of their meal. This is the simple explanation for the twisted sequence of Philo's description: he mentions the tables and dishes first (§ 73), then touches on the president's discourse (§ 75–7), carries on with the Therapeutae's hymnody (§ 80) and only then mentions the meal proper when the tables are finally set (§ 81). For the hymnody, Philo mentions different "measures and melodies," among them the paraspondeia (rites before or in the meal libation) (§ 80), which designate the Paean sung during the libation ceremony. This sequence makes clear that the Therapeutae's meal actually consisted of the second tables only (typically, bread, salt, and hyssop); the main course is replaced by the president's lecture: According to Philo, the Therapeutae lived mostly on spiritual nourishment.[4]

The surprising (perhaps only to moderns) mix of the Therapeutae's educated philosophy on the one hand and their ritual behavior on the other appears even more severe with respect to the most characteristic part of the *pannychis* ritual: their dance

(§ 83–89). Its detailed description is given in the concluding section of Philo's account. At first glance, there seems to be a strong tension between the Therapeutae's striving for the vision of God (§ 12–13) that motivates their thorough philosophical studies (§ 25–29) on the one hand, and their dancing on the other. This dance, however, turns out to be the summit not only of Philo's description of the Therapeutae but also of their ritual: Not unlike David dancing before the ark, it is their dance that causes the Therapeutae's "the very peak of bliss"[5] and, thus, perfects their primary goal of having a vision of God (§ 90).

This tension between the Therapeutae's philosophical studies and their dance poses the main problem to be solved in this article. It is, however, neither possible nor necessary to explore the relationship between the intellectual, cognitive act of studying and the bodily experience of dancing or, to put it more generally, between "body" and "mind." Since Philo only describes the Therapeutae's ritual without describing their beliefs, the methodologically obvious way to answer the question at hand is to do a ritual analysis of their *pannychis*, for both, the philosophical studies and the dance, are part of the same ritual. This methodological approach, however, shifts the focus to the particular capacity of the dance to create innovative results. The ritual progress from listening to the president's allegorical explanations of scripture (§ 75–79) to the group's hymnody (§ 80), their meal (§ 81–82), and finally to their dance (§ 83–89) indicates the dynamics of the Therapeutae's ritual. The main question, therefore, is: How, exactly, does the Therapeutae's dancing have a result that learned philosophy and studying the scriptures alone obviously do not have?[6] The intended answer to this question would then explain how the Therapeutae's ritual "works." To answer this question we look at ritual in Philo in light of Plato, Xenophon, Hesiod, Acts of John, and the Didache.

What Kind of Dance? Socrates in Xenophon's *Symposium*

It is well known that Philo describes the Therapeutae against the literary foils of Plato's and Xenophon's narrative accounts

of *symposia* attended by Socrates: Philo mentions both texts explicitly (§ 57–63) and discredits them for their praise of Eros, particularly in the form of pedophilia. Although Philo seems to take the Platonic *Symposium* more seriously as a preposterous, yet misleading paradigm,[7] the Xenophontic banquet comes much closer to his own description of the Therapeutae: As Philo correctly observes, Xenophon mentions "flute girls and dancers" among "other accompaniments of more unrestraint merrymaking."[8] In contrast to the Platonic *Symposium*, from which the flute girl is expelled,[9] *mousike* (music with poetry) plays an important role in Xenophon's description. Whereas Plato is concerned with sympotic discussion only, *mousike* and dancing in particular are an important and necessary part of Xenophon's *Symposium*: His narrative moves along his description of the performances of professional dancers, a boy and a girl, whom a Syracusian entertainer brought to the party together with a flute player. Their performance—dancing, playing the flute and the lyre, in short, their *mousike*—not only provides "very delightful sights and sounds,"[10] but also prompts the topics of the sympotic discussion and inspires its general solution.[11] Their first instrumental performance with the flute and the lyre is not yet connected to the discussion on the moral good and its teachability.[12] But then, first the girl's (2.8) and then the boy's (2.15) dancing causes a shift in the conversation: Socrates suddenly becomes serious (2.17) and expresses the wish to learn how to dance; he even confesses to dancing for himself in his home. Picturing the eminent philosopher "moving to the beat"[13] in private is surprising not only to modern readers but also to Socrates's company in Xenophon's narrative. Their amazement elegantly provides the possibility of discussing the value of dancing along with the philosophical topics of *paideia* and of the moral value of *kalokagathia* (ideal conduct).

The dancers' final performance, however, demonstrates the clear contrast envisioned by Philo: Philo and Xenophon both let their descriptions of the respective *symposia* end with a dance. In both cases, this dance is the final part not only of the respective rituals, but also of the narrative: Their description of the respective dance drives home the narrative delineation, making

the final point. In Xenophon's symposium, this dance displays Ariadne and Dionysus in close embrace; however, it does not lead to philosophy. Instead, it deeply impresses the sympotic audience: they "were all raised to a high pitch of enthusiasm"[14] and, as a consequence, hastily leave the party and hurry home to their spouses.

Against the background of the parallel connection of philosophy and dance, the contrast between Xenophon and Philo could hardly be more striking. Watching the dance performance allows the Xenophontic banqueters to discuss *kalokagathia* and its teachability but it does not make them morally better. Instead, the dance leads to erotic arousal and results in breaking up the sympotic community. Philo's use of the Xenophontic *Symposium* as a literary foil for his description of the Therapeutic *pannychis* provides him with a walkover: He can easily demonstrate the superiority of the Therapeutae's ritual over the Socratic banquet. Since the dance in the sympotic setting serves as an identity marker, it is important to keep the characteristic differences in mind. Clearly, not any dance can achieve "supreme happiness." To understand the ritual dynamics in the Therapeutic *pannychis*, it is necessary to point out some relevant characteristics of the Therapeutae's dance.

First, it is clear that the setting of both Philo's and Xenophon's references to the dance is the symposium. As we will see later, this aspect is not arbitrary. This setting strongly restricts the great variety of dance types in antiquity.[15] The dramatic chorus dances in tragedy (*emmeleia*), in Satyr plays (*sikinnis*), and in comedy (*kordax*)[16] provide no analogies, neither do the orgiastic dithyrambs that were primarily performed to the accompaniment of percussion instruments and were mythologically and genealogically closely connected to the cults of Dionysus and Magna Mater. Likewise, the *pyrrichē* must be excluded, a rather military dance in armor for enhancing physical skills,[17] as well as the pace and stomp dances of cultic processions. This leaves only two types of dancing in a sympotic setting: one is the often agonistically performed dance as part of the sympotic entertainment, which is attested from the oldest times well into the Roman imperial period,[18] and the other is the omnipresent chorus round dance (*choros*).

Xenophon's account of the sympotic dance clearly falls into the first category: the dance is performed as entertainment in front of, and for the benefit of the sympotic audience. In contrast, the Therapeutae perform the dance themselves: Consequently, in Philo, the dance does not serve the banqueters' entertainment; instead, it is the central part of their own ritual. Both forms of sympotic *mousikē* are clearly distinguished.[19] This is not only true for the different forms of dancing but also for the (variety of) singing.[20]

This background allows for a distinct understanding of Philo's account of the Therapeutae's sympotic activities: After dinner, the *pannychis* begins.[21] All rise and form two choruses, one male and one female, each conducted by the most honored and most musical member of their group (§ 83). Philo describes the double-chorus performance in some detail (§ 84): They sing "versified hymns" in different metrics and according to different melodies; sometimes they sing together in unison, sometimes antiphonally while performing the proper gestures and dance steps. In addition to the variety of texts, melodies, and measures, they perform a similarly wide variety of dramatic choreographies.[22] Just as the variety of the monodic hymnody,[23] the abundance of forms for hymn-dances mentioned by Philo is meant as proof for the Therapeutae's enthusiasm, as Christian parallels demonstrate.[24]

The distinction between the Philonic and the Xenophontic symposia is clear now: Xenophon's description of the erotic dance has a counterpart in the Therapeutae's individual *mousikē* mentioned in § 80 (this is not to say, of course, that Philo would draw this analogy at all). However, the Therapeutae's choral performance (§ 83–84) has no ritual counterpart in Xenophon at all. Since the Socratic banqueters only witness the dance performance, that is, without dancing themselves, they only have the chance to have a (more or less) learned discussion about philosophical topics. The entertainers' dance, however, does not lead to any of the philosophical values that Xenophon's banqueters attribute to dancing.[25] The ritual dynamics that leads to the Therapeutae's "the very peak of bliss" is a result of their dancing in a chorus; it is a communal rather than an individual

experience. That Philo ties this "supreme happiness" to the crossing of the Red Sea seems very close to the way Miriam's dance in Exodus expresses the communal joy of Israel's freedom from Egyptian tyranny.

Erotic and Inspiring: The Joint Choruses

It is only with respect to this distinction that one element in Philo's description catches the eye: Despite Philo's efforts to distinguish the Therapeutic *pannychis* from its Greek counterparts and their underlying topos of *eros* in the sympotic setting, Philo's account is not free of erotic elements. For it is not the choral dance-hymnody in two choruses that effects the Therapeutae's *eudaimonia*. Only after the two separate choruses have finished their performances and "they drink of the liquor of God's love" do they "mix and blend together and become one choir out of two" (§ 85). This formulation (*ginontai choros eis ex amphoin*) strongly, and not accidentally, resembles the formulation of the *complexio oppositorum* of the sexes. Since Philo strongly relates to Plato's *Symposium* (§ 59–63), the formulation "one out of two" can hardly be understood other than as a hint to the erotic unification of the sexes.[26]

The joint chorus's erotic aspects become even more transparent when compared to Greek ritual practice: except for (prepubescent) boys and girls, men and women do not perform together on stage, and most certainly not in an ambisexual chorus. The single exception to this rule is the double male and female chorus in Aristophanes's *Lysistrata*. In this case, the unusual chorus is justified by dramatic reasons: the separated male and female choruses represent the Athenian society's social disruption, whereas the final joining of the two choruses serves as a strong image for the reunified society. The comedic imagery, of course, heavily relies on the erotic undertones of the unification of the choruses, since the women's refusal of their connubial duties constitutes the main motif of the plot. The joining of the two choruses is, therefore, the dramatic means to stage-manage the sexual reunification of men and women in order to demonstrate the pacification of the Athenian society.

With respect to this highly unusual example of men and women joining in a unified chorus, any mention of an ambisexual chorus is heavily tainted by the underlying erotic imagery.

Philo was clearly aware of this problem and tried to separate the Therapeutae's ambisexual chorus from any such association as much as possible. Instead, he claimed that the Therapeutae's joint chorus was an imitation of the Israelites' song-dance performed after crossing the Red Sea; this is, by the way, the only instance in the Hebrew Bible where men and women sing/dance together.[27] Yet, even the Red Sea chorus seemed to be suspicious, for Philo felt the need to justify this biblical example proposing it as the means of the Israelites' salvation: The two separate male and female choruses resembled the initial separation of the water's "solid walls" that opened the space for the Israelites to pass through; but then the sea with the returning tide became one again and drowned the persecutors. Thus, the separation and unification of the water was the "source of salvation" for the Israelites (§ 86). Only when the Israelites, men and women alike, witnessed this miracle did they become so ecstatic that they formed one chorus of either sex in order to praise God the savior (§ 87). Only this extraordinary "act greater than word and thought and hope" justifies the formation of an ambisexual chorus at all.

Considering this general background, the question has to be raised as to why Philo took the risk to adhere to the burdened image of an ambisexual chorus at all and went to such lengths in order to neutralize its sexual connotations. Apparently, he could not possibly abandon the image of a joint chorus for ritual reasons: it is only through this unified chorus that the Therapeutae's ecstasy is made perfect, and they are led to *eudaimonia*. The basic reason can be seen in the Therapeutae's inspiration, which seems to rely on dancing with erotic undertones.

From the oldest references onward, the Muses are connected to the concept of providing poetic inspiration. For this reason the poet's invoking the Muses is an established part of Greek poetry. The best known examples include Homer,[28] and Hesiod, who started his Theogony with an extended invocation to the Muses that concludes with the request: "Hail, children of Zeus, grant longing song!"[29] According to Hesiod, the Muses

do not simply convey a poetic language but also know how "to utter truth," including prophetic knowledge.[30] Although Hesiod does not explain how exactly these powers were conferred upon him, his mentioning the Muses' dancing seems to be the way by which he received the inspiration: They dance around Zeus's altar on the Helicon,[31] and while dancing and uttering "through their mouths a lovely voice, they sing the laws and the truthful ways of all the immortals, uttering their lovely voice."[32]

The connection of the Muses' dancing and their inspiration constitutes a firm tradition-historical topos.[33] Whoever is included in their round-dance on the Helicon comes close to the divine, hears their song of unspeakable truth—and participates in it. In this understanding, the erotic elements are constitutive.

A good example is the report of Archilochos's poetic initiation.[34] It is part of a decree that was aiming at the creation of an association for the celebration of the poet.[35] Archilochos is sent to the city to sell a cow; leaving very early in the middle of the night, the moon still shining, he meets a group of "glorious women" who include him with "flirtation and laughter" and ask him, if he would sell the cow. Archilochos answers, yes, if they gave him an adequate prize. Suddenly, the women and the cow are nowhere to be seen; instead, Archilochos finds a lyre at his feet and understands that the women were the Muses who initiated him. It is only later that a Delphic oracle confirms this interpretation.[36]

Dance and Ritual: Charis

Philo's is a literary text and serves, to a greater or a lesser degree, literary ends by literary means.[37] In order to get closer to the ritual experience that is supposed to form the background of Philo's description, it is helpful to consult ritual texts. Further, we consult a range of such texts.

The early Christ movement handbook of the Didache is one such ritual text, at least in part. The *charis*-invocation of Didache 10.6a gains its particularity as a divine entity that corresponds to, among other things, the inner essence of inspiring dance:

In a sympotic setting, after the thanksgiving prayer following the dinner and preceding the rubrics excluding the unworthy from the meal, there is an invocation of the Charis: "The grace/*charis* shall come, this world shall perish! Hosianna to the son of David."[38] A number of analogies closely connect the meal prayers of the Didache and the dance-hymn in Acts of John[39] and shed further light on Philo's description of the Therapeutae ritual: the exclusion of the unworthy from the meal[40] resembles the moral preconditions for receiving a revelation. The prayers give thanks for spiritual gifts, which are "made known to us by thy servant Jesus."[41] I have argued that the revelation of these gifts does not refer to an otherwise unknown narrative but to the text of the prayers themselves, which closely resembles the Therapeutae's pneumatic hymns.[42] Furthermore, the sympotic context connects the prayers to the rituals described by Philo and the dance in Acts of John. Furthermore, the Didache prayers are part of a liturgical formulary that is aimed to be used for recitation: Like the dance-hymn, they directly reflect ritual practice. Most important, however, is the fact that *charis* plays a central role in this construction of inspiration for praying properly within a sympotic context.

This aspect brings us back in full circle to Philo, who has elaborated this particular connection of dancing and ecstasy in some detail. In his tractate on drunkenness, Philo interprets the figure of Hanna (1Sam 1) as an allegory of *charis* by pointing to the etymological similarity.[43] In this context, Philo explains from where Hannah receives the ability of prophesying.[44] He argues that it is only the divine gift of *charis* that has the inspiring effect on humans; herein, *charis* resembles an inebriant.[45] The analogy of drunkenness and pneumatic ecstasy is of importance,[46] being traditionally connected with the nepenthean dancing in the cult of Dionysus. Yet, in Bacchic rites, ecstasy is not caused by alcoholic excesses all the time; instead, Plutarch describes it as "drunkenness without wine and without grace," which is a consequence of the consumption of bitter ivy.[47] Contrary to this bacchantic ecstasy, neither Hanna's nor the Therapeutae's enthusiastic experience is "without grace (*acharis*)," instead it is a particular effect of *charis*. For, if "a soul is filled by *charis*, it immediately becomes hilarious, it smiles,

and dances. For it is so bacchantically ecstasized (*bebakcheutai*) that to many who are not initiated it appears to be inebriated, drunken and beyond itself."[48]

The technical terminology of this description refers to the Dionysian procession in which the wild dancing was an important part. Philo deliberately uses this language in order to mark the difference between Hanna's and the Dionysiasts' ecstasy: Her ebriety is neither "graceless" (*acharis*), nor is it alcoholically induced. In order to express this particular state of mind, Philo mints the oxymoron of "sober drunkenness," which he used several times in other places.[49] Interestingly, this oxymoron is often connected with wisdom or matters of perception. Thus, as a consequence of Hanna's prayer, her mind leaves the prison of her limited physicality and, after ascending to God, gains the vision of the ideas.[50] This corresponds to the inspiration as enabled by the Charites' dancing. This is also true for the Therapautae. They are enthused by dancing and in spite of prolonging it so that it lasted the whole night through, they emerge even more sober and awake when the *pannychis* is finally over: The "unmixed teaching" of wisdom "inebriates sober drunkenness."[51] Theologically, it is of less interest that the seemingly uncontrollable aspects of dancing and ecstasy appear to be "domesticated" by wisdom and perception. It is more important that the ecstatic experience of dancing seems to be particularly apt to describe inspiration or revelation: gaining wisdom and perception. The rich sympotic imagery that shows up in this context again and again points back to the starting point of this delineation: The religious aspects of ritual dance can only be understood in the framework of their sympotic setting, which is, of course, the setting of Philo's Therapeutae.

Some Results

The attempt to understand the ritual dynamics of the Therapeutae's *pannychis* that led them to "the very peak of bliss" has provided a number of results. The main question at the outset was: How can we understand the Therapeutae's dance as a ritual perfection of their rather cognitive task of philosophizing? In general, the answer is the inspiring effect that is attributed to

dance in antiquity. This rather anemic general answer achieves a higher profile if we consider it within the framework of history of tradition analogies, which add the understanding of ritual. Instead of recapitulating theories concerning its origins, it is probably more significant to explore some of its inherent aspects and to indicate where they might be related to ritual theory.

1. *Intensity, or the ritual body*: If singing is understood, along the proverbial *bis orat qui cantat*,[52] as an increased form of praying, then one is tempted to say in the light of the evidence presented here: *ter orant qui saltant*—thrice pray those who dance. The implied intensification of religious experience of dancing entails two different aspects, which both attribute to the understanding of the ritual body.[53]

On the one hand, the choral dance aggregates the single dancers into a unity that is obviously thought to be stronger than gathering for a communal meal or reciting a common prayer in unison.[54] The stronger the expression of this unity, the more intensive and efficacious the prayer: "We too will strike the stars with words in unison; the saying is that prayers travel more valiantly when united."[55] Since praying in unison is a choral action and always implies a form of dance, this is true for dance as well. In the case of the Therapeutae's dance, Philo's hinting at the multitude of melodies, measures, and choreographic layouts is meant to ensure that their dancing creates a true unity, which has an unsurpassable effect: they present a "harmonious concent" and "music in the truest sense."[56] However, social unity is not the final result of the Therapeutae's dancing: after merging the two separate choruses into one, they split off again and "stand with eyes and their whole bodies turned to the east" greeting the sun (§ 89). Although the main difference of gender was overcome in the ritual, the Therapeutae do not end up in an indiscriminate crowd.[57] The capacity of the ritual dance to temporarily suspend the gender distinction only asserts the lasting importance of this difference between male and female: For the Therapeutae, the gender difference remains fundamental. Its temporary suspension in repetitive ritual action only asserts this distinction's lasting function for defining the Therapeutae's social identity.[58]

That this kind of ritual "parcelling" has a strong unifying effect can be shown by the difference of ritual and nonritual practice.[59] The Therapeutae's standing alone by themselves at the end of the ritual closely resembles their individual living and studying in their houses (§ 30). Philo explains (§ 24): their houses were built in a greater distance than it is usually the case in cities, for they seek solitude; on the other hand, they are not too far from each other, for they cherish community (*koinonia*). The obvious ambiguity of Philo's description with respect to the Therapeutae's sense of solitude *and* of community closely corresponds to their ritual, which can be seen as ritual perfection along the lines of parcelling and unification: their standing by themselves in the end *after* having been united in one chorus is a ritual assertion, and perfection, of their way of life.

Yet, the erotic associations connected to ambisexual dancing carry their own weight: the bodily experience is an essential part of religion in antiquity in general and of our concept of inspiration in particular.[60] Commenting on Virgil, Servius explains: "The reason for dancing in religion is that our ancestors would not have a single part of their bodies to be without religious sentiment. For singing belongs to the soul, and dancing belongs to the movement of the body."[61] Dancing is, as the German poet Heinrich Heine put it, "praying with ones legs"[62]—a truly comprehensive and holistic religious experience. That religious experience relates to the complete human being is not only true for all ancient religions: reducing religion to the act of reflection on religion (and by doing so, devaluating the body) is a particular development of Western Christianity since the Enlightenment.

In this respect, understanding the Therapeutae's dance along the lines of ritual theory easily overcomes the fallacious dichotomies of individual—society, or body—mind. Neither distinction is adequate for the Therapeutae's ritual. The choral dance requires both, the individual as well as the communal activity, and it forms both, the individual and the social body. On the other hand, ritual formation of the body implies that no part of experience—sensitive, cognitive, or emotional—is left out.

2. *Expression and impression*. In all these evidences gathered, dancing does not exert the function of *expressing* religious feelings or consciousness: dancing does not transform an inner quality to a visible, tangible outside, for this would require that prior to the ritual practice there existed any such inner quality. The inside/outside distinction, however helpful it may be for the phenomenology of religion, is of no avail for the question of which came first: the egg or the hen.

Again, it is helpful to distinguish two aspects: looking at the *pannychis* ritual as a whole (as it is distinguished from the Therapeutae's nonritual existence during the week) sheds light on the different parts of the ritual, which included not only dancing and singing, but also listening to the president's erudite lecture: if philosophical reflection is taken as an example for an "inside" phenomenon, this aspect is not only present in the preparation of studying individually, but it is also part of the ritual. The complete ritual includes actions pertinent both to the "inside" and to the "outside"; again, the ritual overcomes an ostensible dichotomy.

However, since the ritual advances in different sub-actions (meeting, reclining, listening to the lecture, eating, singing, and various forms of dancing), it describes a deliberate process with its summit at the end. Gaining the highest *eudaimonia* may be the result of a longer ritual development but it is nevertheless connected with the last step only: dancing in an ambisexual chorus is stressed more than the other parts of the ritual. The history of religion analogies with the close connection between inspiration and dancing with Muses or Charites shifts the focus to the dynamic innovation of this part of the ritual. The egg-and-hen-problem is, therefore, not completely undecidable. Religious innovation begins with the dance or, to use the inside—outside metaphor, with the "outside" dynamics of bodies: dancing creates religious experience, as is evident in the history of ancient Israel, the emergence of Rabbinic practice, and the range of Jewish piety in medieval and even early modern times.

This aspect is of some importance when compared to early Christian ideas on receiving the spirit. As it is well known, the New Testament consistently presupposes that all Christians

receive the spirit but never explains how exactly this is happening. Taking into account that the spirit is not only individually received (which may or may not be connected with baptism) but also collectively makes this question all the more urgent.[63] The concept of inspiration through dancing indicates that religious initiation begins with joining the ritual practice of others. This initial step is unattainable for the individual: It presupposes that a group—or a chorus of dancers/singers—already exists into which an individual is integrated.

3. *Aesthetics and ethics*: To a surprisingly high degree, the texts on dancing show sensitivity to the aesthetic dimension of religion or, to put it the other way round with respect to the particularly literary references, to the religious aspects of art. Most of the examples mentioned so far conceptualize this aspect as *charis*. In this context, *charis* and the English word "grace" are only in part semantically equivalent. Seen against a New Testament background, the dominant connotation of "grace" would be the gift character or the contradiction of justice and mercy. Although these aspects do belong to the semantics of *charis*, they do not fully cover the aspects of pleasantness and cheerfulness. It is this very aspect that is personified in the image of the Charites' round-dance as the next analogy to the Muses' dance.[64]

Rather, this image of the Charites' dance embraces different aspects: There is the aesthetic dimension according to which salvation is experienced as something beautiful and pleasant; neither is it accidental that Philo connects *charis* with *chara* (joy), nor is it arbitrary that the Therapeutae's dance leads them to *eudaimonia*. But there is also the ethical dimension of the moral good. This is evident from the analogy of Charites and the Virtues and their respective round-dances: Whoever "dances with Charites" participates in the Virtues, and vice versa. Ethics and aesthetics do not relate to each other as requirement and reward but are two aspects of the same ritual practice. This all-encompassing experience of dancing with the Charites is the experience of sympotic delight.

4. *Cognition, ecstasy, and revelation*: Finally, a noetic-cognitive aspect belongs to the religious experience of dancing. Participating in the dance changes perception and results in

increased knowledge—this is the widely accepted presupposition of invoking the Muses in poetry. This aspect is as central for the dance-hymn in the Acts of John as it is for Philo's description of the Therapeutae: what philosophical studies alone cannot achieve, dancing can. Or, to put it more bluntly in the words of the dance-hymn: "The one who does not dance, does not understand."

Interestingly, this kind of understanding or innovative knowledge is always connected with some form of ecstatic experience, as in the Therapeutae's "enthusiasm" and their merging into a seemingly improper, ambisexual chorus. This "dangerous," uncontrollable aspect of dancing indicates the unavailability of religious experience: it is something that happens to people but not something they can "make" or instrumentalize. Yet, the ritual provides the means to create this unavailable experience.

As it has been shown, this aspect of uncontrollable savageness is in all instances carefully countered, as in Philo's indicating the Red Sea chorus example. On a descriptive level, Philo's oxymoron of "sober drunkenness" is an attempt to come to terms with both aspects, the savageness of religious experience and its domesticated control: the Therapeutae's ecstasy is not conceptualized as orgiastic (as one would it imagine for the Dionysian dithyrambs) but happens in measured forms that are represented by the Therapeutae's quietness. It is the ritual rules that control the uncontrollable aspects of religion. Philo's portrait of the Therapeutae meal, its intense introductory critique of Greek and Roman banquets even while following closely the form of these banquets, and the appeal to the deeply rooted imagery of Exodus map out a kind of meal practice is thus part of early Judaism that both resists and integrates the imperial dominance in the larger society.

This syndrome of innovation and cognitive perception, of ethics and aesthetics, of unavailability and ecstasy comprises what, in theological tradition, is called revelation. In this respect, it is to be expected that Philo never mentions any of the Therapeutae's teachings; for what would be the proper contents of this kind of revelation? The Therapeutae's ritual aims at bringing them close to the divine, and herein it achieves ritual perfection in an unsurpassable way.

Notes

1. Troels Engberg-Pedersen, "Philo's De Vita Contemplativa as a Philosopher's Dream" *JSJ* 30 (1999): 40–64; M. A. Beavis, "Philo's Therapeutai: Philosopher's Dream or Utopian Construction?" *JSPE* 14 (2004): 30, 42; D. M. Hay, "Things Philo Said and Did Not Say about the Therapeutae," *SBL.SP* 31 (1992): 673–683.
2. R. Bergmeier, *Die Essener-Berichte des Flavius Josephus*, *Quellenstudien Zuden Essenertexten Im Werk Des Jüdischen Historiographen* (Kampen: Kok Pharo, 1993), 42ff; H. Szesnat, "'Mostly Aged Virgins': Philo and the Presence of the Therapeutrides at Lake Mareotis," *Neotestamentica* 32 (1998): 191–201.
3. Hay, Things Philo Said (n. 1); 673 n. 1; M. Ebner, "Mahl und Gruppenidentität: Philos Schrift *De Vita Contemplativa* als Paradigma," in *Herrenmahl und Gruppenidentität* (QD 221), ed. M. Ebner, 64–90 (Freiburg–Basel–Wien: Herder, 2007). For the contrasting meal practices cf. Hay, "Foils for the Therapeutae". References to Other Texts and Persons in Philo's 'De Vita Contemplativa,'" in *Neotestamentica et Philonica* (FS P. Borgen) (NT.S 106), ed. D. E. Aune, 330–348 (Leiden: Brill, 2003).
4. Ebner, Mahl (n. 3), 73–75.
5. They have gained the "love of God" (*theou philia*) and thus risen up to the "highest felicity" (*akrotes eudaimonia*). For the philological and philosophical problems in this paragraph and their convincing solution, cf. D. T. Runia, "The Reward for Goodness: Philo, De Vita Contemplativa 90," *The Studia Philonica Annual* 9 (1997): 3–18.
6. It is noteworthy that Philo only casually characterizes the writings read by the Theraputae as "holy scriptures" (§ 28, 75, 78) and identifies them as "the whole legislation" (§ 78), although his reference to Ex 15 (§ 86–7) is clear enough proof that he envisions them all along as Jews.
7. Philo occupies himself with a summary of Plato's banquet in five paragraphs (§ 59–63), but only briefly mentions Xenophon's banquet, which "is more concerned with ordinary humanity" (§ 58).
8. Philo § 58, referring to Xenophon, Symp. 2.
9. Plato, Symp. 176e.
10. Xenophon, Symp. 2.2: *theamata kai akroamata hedista*. *"Akroamata"* is the technical term for sympotic entertainment; cf. Matthias Klinghardt, *Gemeinschaftsmahl und Mahlgemeinschaft: Soziologie und Liturgie frühchristlicher Mahlfeiern*. Texte und Arbeiten zum neutestamentlichen Zeitalter 13. (Tübingen: Francke Verlag, 1996), 118–125.

11. V. Wohl, "Dirty Dancing: Xenophon's Symposium," in *Music and the Muses: The Culture of Mousikē in the Classical Athenian City*, ed. P. Murray and P. Wilson, 337–363 (Oxford: Oxford University, 2004).
12. Cf. 2.2–7 on the "smell" of *kalogagathia*.
13. Wohl, n. 11, 337.
14. Xenophon, Symp. 9.5. E. C. Marchant's translation in the LCL edition renders the Greek *ad usum delphini*: the graphical expression that "they were winged up (*anapteromenoi*)" evokes the picture of phallus birds or winged phalli, indicating that the (all male) audience had an erection.
15. For the most important descriptions cf. Lucian's De saltationibus; Athenaeus, Deipn. 1 (20d–22e); Pollux, Onomast. 4.95–105. Modern research includes: K. Latte, *De saltationibus Graecorum capita quinque* (RGVV 13/3) (Gießen: Töpelmann, 1913); F. Weege, *Der Tanz in der Antike* (Halle: Niemeyer, 1926) (repr. Hildesheim: Olms, 1967); R. Toelle-Kastenbein, *Frühgriechische Reigentänze* (Waldsassen: Stiftland, 1964); T. B. L. Webster, *The Greek Chorus* (London: Methuen, 1970).
16. H. D. Kitto, "The Dance in Greek Tragedy," *JHS* 75 (1955): 36–41; L. B. Lawler, *The Dance of the Ancient Greek Theatre* (Iowa City: Iowa University Press, 1964).
17. Cf. Plato, Leg. 815a/b; Xenophon, Anab. 6.1.1–13; Athenaeus 15 (631b).
18. Cf. Od. 8.370ff. For the agonistic character of such dances, cf. the famous Dipylon oinochoe (eighth century, Athens, Nat. Mus. Inv. 192) with the supposedly oldest Greek vase inscription: "He who among all the dancers performs most gracefully (shall receive this vase)." A millennium later, Athenaeus still mentions the most famous dancers' names. Cf. B. Powell, "The Dipylon Oinochoe Inscription and the Spread of Literacy in 8th Century Athens," *Kadmos* 27 (1988): 65–86.
19. Plutarch, Quaest. conv. 1.5 (615a/b) distinguishes between the choral song of the *paean* and the monodic performance of *skolia*; cf. Artemon, fr. 10, FHG 4.342 = Athenaeus 15 (694b/c).
20. The acroamatic songs, the *skolia*, are performed individually as entertainment for the banqueters, whereas the *paean*, the hymn accompanying the libation ceremony, is performed by the group as a whole: it is sung in unison. Both modalities of singing are attested for the Therapeutae: in addition to their choral dance-song, Philo mentions that after the president, the others take their turn as they are arranged (*katatatzeis*) in singing solistically, while the rest of them listen in silence (§ 80) (cf. 1Cor 14.26; Tertullian, Apol. 39.18). Their choral performance (§

83–88) is clearly distinguished from these monodic songs and ritually separated from them by the frugal meal of foodstuff typical of the dessert (§ 81–82).The similarity between the Therapeutic choral dance and the *paean* hints to another typical element: choral dancing and choral singing can hardly be distinguished. In antiquity, the unison recitation of poetic texts in a group does not allow for the distinction of speaking, rap-like "sprechgesang," and singing. More important is the fact that this kind of choral recitation was not possible without a dance-like movement: The verb χορεύειν, describing the activity of a chorus (*choros*), designates the choral singing as well as the choral dancing (Cf. B. Kowalzig, "Changing Choral Worlds: Song-Dance and Society in Athens and Beyond," in *Music and the Muses: The Culture of Mousike in the Classical Athenian City*, ed. P. Murray and P. Wilson, 39–65 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); F. G. Naerebout, "Moving Events: Dance at Public Events in the Ancient Greek World; Thinking through its Implications," in *Ritual and Communication in the Greco-Roman World*, ed. E. Stavrianopoulou. Kernos Suppl. 16, 37–67 (Liége: CIERGA, 2006). This means: Wherever singing or the recitation of a text by a chorus is mentioned, dancing must be envisioned along with it—and vice versa. Not surprisingly, there even exists the expression "to sing . . . the dance" (Cf. the minutes of a Delphic association of Technitai: FD III/2, n. 48, l. 21–22). Similarly, see Theognis 777ff; Plutarch, De EI, 389b etc.). This connection of choral singing and dancing is often attested by ancient sources. Two typical examples from Rome include the *collegium Saliorum*, who performed a characteristic dance with song or song with dance. Although their dancing was so characteristic for the *Salii* that they gained their name from it (Cf. Cicero, Orat. 3.197; Horace, Ep. 2.1.86 etc. Of particular interest is Livy 1.20.4), a number of witnesses mention their singing alone. Another example is the *collegium fratrum Arvalium* from the imperial period.

21. This sequence (meal—symposium—nocturnal dance) is typical, cf. Euripides, Heracl. 778ff; Heliodorus, Aethiop. 1.10 (13 Bekker); Plutarch, De prof. virt. 5 (77e/f); Quaest. conv. 55 (227b) etc.
22. Philo mentions genres of dramatic chorus song-dances: The *prosodion* is probably not the cultic processional hymn but the chorus' entrance song (usually called *parodos*). This understanding is reasonable, since the following *stasimon* clearly means the stationary song performed by the dramatic chorus in the orchestra. The *stasimon* is composed of *strophai* and *antistrophai* (all genres mentioned in 83).

23. Cf. § 80: The monodic songs exist of "hymns in many measures and melodies, hexameters and iambics, lyrics suitable for processions or in libations and at the altars . . . with careful metrical arrangements to fit the various evolutions."
24. Cf. the "pneumatic psalms, hymns, and odes" in Col 3.16 and Eph 5.19. For the interpretation cf. M. Hengel, "Das Christuslied im frühesten Gottesdienst," in *Weisheit Gottes—Weisheit der Welt II*, 357–404 (St. Ottilien: EOS, 1987); Klinghardt (n. 10), 349–351.
25. Interestingly, Xenophon seems to be aware of this distinction. Whereas the dance performance arouses the audience (9.7: the unmarried spectators vow for marriage and the married ones hurry to their spouses), the boy and the girl who performed the dance appear to be truly in love with each other. (9.6: Their dance does not leave them unaffected.)
26. Plato, Symp. 193d: *poiesai ekek dusin*. Here, it is the *eros* that achieves this unification of the sexes. For the Christian reception of this idea cf. 2Clem 12.2(-6); Gos. Phil. (NHC II/3, p. 70,9ff). Clem. Alex., Strom. 3.13.92–3; Gos. Thom. 22; 106 etc. For further references see: W. A. Meeks, "The Image of the Androgyne: Some Uses of a Symbol in Early Christianity," *History of Religions* 13 (1974): 165–208; cf. also M. Bouttier, "Complexio Oppositorum: Sur les Formules de I Cor. xii. 13; Gal. iii. 26–28, Col. iii. 10, 11," *NTS* 23 (1976/77):1–19.
27. First "Moses and the sons of Israel" sing an ode for God (Ex 15.1 LXX), then they are joined by the prophetess Miriam, and "all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances" (15.20). In Rabbinic literature, the Red Sea chorus serves as the example for collective inspiration par excellence: Cf. M. Sota 5.4; pSota 5.6 (20c); Mekhilta R. Jishmael 2.6 (115 Horovitz-Rabin); Mekhilta R. Shimon Ex 14.31 (70 Epstein-Melamed) etc. See also E. Grözinger, *Musik und Gesang in der Theologie der frühen jüdischen Literatur, Talmud – Midrasch – Mystik* (TSAJ 3) (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1982), 99–107; P. Schäfer, *Die Vorstellung vom Heiligen Geist in der rabbinischen Literatur* (StANT 28) (München: Kösel, 1972), 66.
28. Od. 1.1–9; Il. 1.1.
29. Hesiod, Theog. 1–104.
30. Hesiod, Theog. 28 (*aletheia gerusasthai*), 31–32: "They breathed into me a divine voice (*enepneusan de moi auden thespin*) in order to praise what will come to be and what has been before."
31. Theog. 3–4.
32. Theog. 65–67.

33. Only a few examples from Hellenistic and Roman imperial times shall demonstrate the tradition: In Theocritus, Id. 1.92, the Muses' song causes the poet's wish to join the virgins' dance (ὅτι οὐ μετὰ ταῖσι χορεύεις). Propertius, El. 3.5.20: The poet's joining the Muses' round dance (*musarumque choris implicuisse manus*) granted him a life-long "musical" existence, which included philosophy; cf. M. Klinghardt, "Tanz ins Glück. Religionsgeschichtliches zum Musen- und Charitenreigen," in *Noctes Sinenses,* ed. A. Heil and J. Sauer (Heidelberg: Winter, 2011). Cf. also Virgil, Ecl. 10.54: The poet's dancing with the Nymphs on the Arcadian Maenala mountains (*interea mixtis lustrabo Maenala Nymphis*) corresponds with his invoking of the Muse Arethusa in the beginning (10.1: *extremum tunc, Arethusa, mihi concede laborem*) as the means of poetic inspiration.
34. The Muses' flirting and laughing with Archilochos is a typical and important element. This becomes most evident in an early Christian analogy, the so-called Arcadia vision in the Shepherd of Hermas. In this second century CE apocalyptic writing, the Shepherd, a divine figure, appears to the narrator Hermas and grants him revelations. Text and translation: U. H. J. Körtner/M. Leutzsch. *Schriften des Urchristentums III* (Darmstadt: Wissensch. Buchgesellschaft, 1984), 107–359. Cf. the commentary by N. Brox, *Der Hirt des Hermas* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991). All references relate to the last part of the book containing the "similitudines" (sim. 9).
35. For the text of the inscription (four columns on two slabs), cf. W. Peek, "Neues von Archilochos," *Philologus* 99 (1955): 4–50.
36. SEG 15, 517, col. II.1, ll. 23–52.
37. An important analogy to the literary syndrome of dancing, chanting, and receiving inspiration is the so-called dance-song from the Acts of John. This second century CE text shows what a ritualization of this syndrome might have looked like. AJ 94–96 provides a representation of the passion narrative: Immediately before being captured, that is, in exactly the place where the Gospels talk about the Last Supper, Jesus gathers his 12 disciples in order to "sing a hymn to the Father." He has them form a circle around him holding their hands, steps in the middle of the circle, and requests that they respond to him with Amen. A long, elaborate hymn follows, beginning with a detailed doxology to the father, the spirit, and the grace. The hymn's main part consists of 24 short lines containing the narration with the cause for the thanksgiving, each followed by the disciples' Amen response. In his function of the monitor and leading dancer, Jesus and the disciples form a unity.

As the rubrics regarding the choreography indicate, this part of the passion narrative reflects liturgical practice. This liturgical formulary for a ritual dance provides a number of further insights. The Charis, to which the last part of the initial doxology is dedicated, has to be understood as a part of the disciples' round-dance around Jesus: dancing itself has a divine quality.

38. Did. 10.1–5.
39. Did. 9–10 and Acts of John 94–6. See note 37 Re: Acts of John.
40. Did. 10.6b, cf. 9.5. Since H. Lietzmann, *Messe und Herrenmahl*, (AKG 8) (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1955), 229, the *maranatha*-formula was understood as part of the dialogue between liturgist and community as we have it in numerous later liturgies. This understanding, however, would require extensive changes of the transmitted text. I have argued that the *maranatha* is rather meant as a threat in order to warn against unworthy communion, cf. Klinghardt (n. 10), 402–405.
41. Did. 9.2, 3; 10.2
42. Klinghardt (n. 10), 460–464. Cf. also M. Klinghardt, "Tanz und Offenbarung: Praxis und Theologie des gottesdienstlichen Tanzes im frühen Christentum," *Spes Christiana* 15–16, (2004–2005), 9–35: 27–28.
43. Philo explains the etymology of the name "Hanna" (*channāh* in Hebrew) by its similarity to *chānan* (to have mercy) or *chēn* (grace), respectively. For this etymological argument cf. Immut. 5, Migr. Abr. 196, and in particular Somn. 1.254–255.
44. In Somn. 1.254 Philo calls Hanna a "prophetess and mother of a prophet."
45. Ebr. 145–146. The analogy of pneumatic ecstasy and drunkenness is common and widely recieved; it lies at the center of both the Hanna story (1Sam 1.12–4) and the Pentecost story (Act 2.13).
46. Cf. Plutarch, Def. orac. 40 (432e/f) attributes a similar effect to the prophetic *pneuma*.
47. Plutarch, Quaest. Rom. 112 (291a): *aoinos methe kai acharis.*
48. Ebr. 146.
49. For references cf. H. Lewy, *Sobria Ebrietas: Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der antiken Mystik*, (BZNW 9) (Gießen: Töpelmann, 1929), 1–34.
50. Ebr. 152
51. Cf. Philo, Prob. lib. 12: akratos didaskalia . . . methuein ten nephalion . . . methen.
52. The attribution of this saying to Augustine cannot be verified.
53. Cf. C. Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 94–117.

54. On praying in unison—with one voice/una voce/mia phone—cf. Klinghardt (n. 10), 456–457; Klinghardt (n. 20–24.
55. Petronius, fr. 92 (Baehrens 1992: 96): *Nos quoque confusis feriemus sidera verbis / fama est coniunctas forius ire preces.*
56. § 88: *enarmonion sumphonian … kai mousiken ontos.*
57. Philo is highly aware of gender issues, cf. his description of the meeting room with the separating wall between the compartments for men and for women (§ 32–33); the emphatic reference that women—however, "mostly aged virgins"—participated in the meals (§ 68) indicates that Philo would otherwise see participation of women in meals critically.
58. J. Z. Smith, *To Take Place: Toward a Theory in Ritual* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 109, contended that "ritual is, above all, an assertion of difference."
59. Cf. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Naked Man: Introduction to a Science of Mythology*, vol. 4 (New York: Harper and Row, 1981), 660–679.
60. Cf. O. Taplin, "Spreading the Word through Performance," in *Performance Culture and Athenian Democracy*, ed. S. Goldhill and R. Osborne, 33–57 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).
61. Servius, In Virg. ecl. 5.73: *sane ut in religionibus saltaretur, haec ratio est, quod nullam maiores nostri partem corporis esse voluerunt, quae non sentiret religionem: nam cantus ad animum, saltatio ad mobilitatem pertinet corporis.*
62. H. Heine, *Historisch-kritische Gesamtausgabe 4. Atta Troll* (Hamburg: Hoffmann & Campe, 1985), 28: "Also vor der Bundeslade / Tanzte weiland König David; / Tanzen war ein Gottesdienst, / War ein Beten mit den Beinen."
63. For example, 1Cor. 12.1–3.
64. This semantic range of *charis* has close analogies in sympotic experience and in descriptions of successful symposia, cf. Klinghardt (above n. 10), 163–174.

CHAPTER 9

Contrasting Banquets: A Literary Commonplace in Philo's *On the Contemplative Life* and Other Greek and Roman Symposia

Jonathan Brumberg-Kraus

> *But since the story of these well-known symposia is full of such follies, and stand self-convicted in the eyes of any who do not regard conventional opinions and the widely circulated report which declares them to have been all that they should be, I will describe in contrast the festal meetings of those who have dedicated their own life and themselves to knowledge and the contemplation of the verities of nature, following the truly sacred instructions of the prophet Moses. (Philo, On the Contemplative Life)*[1]

> *But in the symposium of Epicurus there is an assemblage of flatterers praising one another, while the symposium of Plato is full of men who turn their noses up in jeers at one another; for I pass over in silence what is said about Alcibiades. In Homer, on the other hand, only sober symposia are organized. (Athenaeus, Deipnosophistae)*[2]

When Philo says in *On the Contemplative Life* what I cite herein, he locates his work securely in the *literary* tradition of Greek and Roman symposia. For as Athenaeus's similar type of remark in the second quotation suggests, it became a commonplace in Greek and Roman literary symposia to contrast one's

own symposium or favored banquet practices with those of Others. In this paper I show first that "contrasting banquets" is a commonplace of the Greek and Roman literary tradition to which Philo's description of the meals of the Therapeutae belongs. Then I show how Philo chooses not to use perhaps the defining characteristic of the Greek and Roman literary symposia per se, the dramatic dialogue format, which represents characters conversing over a meal. Finally, I show why Philo eschews the sympotic dialogue format in his account of the Therapeutae'symposia in *On the Contemplative Life*. He wishes to play down the conflicts, especially over competing ideas, for which the sympotic dialogue form is especially well suited. Instead, Philo idealizes the harmoniousness and unity of the Therapeutae community at their meals, in contrast to the discord and drunkenness characteristic of Others' banquets.

The commonplace to declare "our symposium is better than yours" is the one sympotic literary convention Philo finds most amenable to his ends. In the tradition from which Philo draws it, such contrasts of banquets may be as long as Athenaeus's extended comparison of Homeric "symposia" to Plato and Xenophon's *Symposia*, as well as to Epicurus's and Others (*Deipnosophistae* Book V: 186–188ff),[3] or as short as the elliptical remark in the Passover symposium prescribed in the Mishnah, Pesahim 10:8; *v'ayn maftirin ahar ha-pesah afikomen* "one adds no after-dinner revelry [*epikomion*] after eating the Passover lamb." That is to say implicitly, "unlike what those other people do in their symposia." Obviously, Philo in *On the Contemplative Life* expresses the same sentiments when he contrasts the meals of the Therapeutae with both literary banquets, like the symposia of Plato and Xenophon (57–63), and the Cyclops' "banquet" of Odysseus' men (40–41), and "real" "Italian"-style banquets remarkable for their costliness and luxury (48–56).[4] Indeed, even these "real" Italian banquets are not so real. Lavishly descriptive, sensual depictions of their emphasis on the flavor, abundance, variety, and elaborate visual presentation of the food (48–49, 53–56), and the long-haired, effeminate "boy-toy" waiters dressed in their hiked-up tunics who serve it (50–52), and the drunken physical brawls to which

the meals often degenerate (40–47), are by Philo's day a literary commonplace (i.e., in Horace's *Satires*, the *cena Trimalchionis* in Petronius's *Satyricon*, and later, Lucian's *Convivium vel Lapithae*). All this is to say that Philo "doth protest too much" when saying he simply describes the Therapeutae as they are. Rather, Philo's descriptions of banquets are seen through and colored by the lens of the Greek and Roman tradition of *literary* symposia on two significant counts. First, his word choice of "symposia" to describe the meals of the Therapeutae and the banquets including Plato's literary Symposium to which he contrasts them, and secondly his contrast itself of "our good" and "their bad" banquets are themselves conventions of the sympotic literary tradition. Philo's reference to them proves he knows them.

Consequently, if we examine not only the conventions of the sympotic literary tradition Philo chooses, but also those which he does not, we will come to a clearer understanding of his ideological intentions in his description of the meals of the Therapeutae. There is a pattern in how Philo contrasts the "good" symposia of the Therapeutae with the "bad" symposia of everybody else, which is surprisingly unsympotic. Philo contrasts primarily the material elements of the Therapeutae's meals with those of Other banquets, as mentioned earlier. But most critics, ancient and modern, agree that what distinguishes symposia from Other literary depictions of meals is that they are dialogues. Accordingly, most literary symposia depict some sort of argument or contest of wisdom, the so-called *agon sophias*. In contrast, long, lavish descriptions of the food and the other material elements of the meal, with little or no dialogue, belong to the genre of the *deipnon*.[5] That would require us to classify Philo's work as a literary *deipnon*, rather than a literary symposium per se.

And, finally, some ancient critics, most notably Athenaeus, stress that what distinguishes good literary symposia from bad literary symposia is their variation of characters and settings for the meal. Thus, according the character Masurius in Book V of the *Deipnosophistae*, on the one hand, the *Symposia* with Socrates of Plato and Xenophon are aesthetically superior to

Epicurus's (lost) *Symposium*, because the former depicts representatives of different philosophical schools conversing, while the latter has only Epicureans talking to one another.[6] On the other hand, "Homeric symposia" are superior to all these because Homer varies not only the characters at meals, but also the settings (dinner in the cave of the Cyclops, in the humble shed of the swineherd Eumaeus, etc.). The greater the *poikilia* ("variation" or "diversity") symposia demonstrate in their composition, the better they are, at least in Athenaeus's estimation (and probably also Lucian, and perhaps even the author of the Gospel of Luke [14:7–14]).[7]

A quick inventory of Philo's composition shows that he rejects the "more sympotic" option of every one of these literary conventions available to him. First, Philo chooses not to compose his work as a dialogue, nor does he frame it in the setting of a meal—even though the topic of his treatise is meals. Instead of dramatizing the contrast between different ways of life in competing, arguing characters at a meal, Philo chooses on the one hand to contrast the good meals of the Therapeutae with meals that focus on mere appearance, sensory stimulation, and material and sexual pleasure, and the form he uses is basically the *deipnon*—the catalog of what's served rather than what's said. On the other hand, when he contrasts the "bad" conversations of Plato and Xenophon's literary symposia with the moderate, temperate conduct of the Therapeutae meals, Philo does not represent Plato, Xenophon, or Socrates as characters in a dialogue speaking for themselves, but rather summarizes and criticizes their arguments about love, especially homo-erotic love, without giving them any opportunity for rebuttal, as a dialogue would. It's remarkable that a Platonist like Philo finds so little use for the dialogue genre so crucial to Plato's own philosophical expression.

Consequently, one feature of the dialogue form of symposia conspicuously absent in Philo's work is the technique of using some sort of occurrence in the meal to prompt a discussion. For example, in Plato's *Symposium*, Aristophanes's hiccups at the table become a pretext for the doctor Eryximachus to go into a little speech on cures for hiccups, and then to segue

to his speech on Love, since the comic poet's hiccups render him incapable of taking his turn according to the characters' earlier agreed-upon sequence of speeches. We find this literary device frequently in the encyclopedic symposia of Athenaeus and Plutarch's *Quaestiones Conviviales*, in the sympotic meal rules of the Passover seder in the Mishnah (i.e., the Four Questions and R. Gamaliel's saying about the three symbolic foods of Passover), and in the comedic symposia, such as in the *cena Trimalchionis* episode in Petronius's *Satyricon*.[8] This technique can be employed either to accentuate the departure of characters' behaviors from the norms of the banquet setting or to emphasize their consistency with them. But you can't use it to make this or any other point unless you have a dialogue that allows characters to address one another and the circumstances of their banquet's setting. Philo therefore doesn't use it.

Along the same lines, while there is a sort of *agon sophias* in Philo's treatise, it is set *outside* the context of the meals he describes, rather than in the literary setting of meal, as is typically the case of literary symposia. It is not part of a dramatic dialogue between competing philosophical rivals when Philo characterizes his encomium of the contemplative way of life of the Therapeutae as a battle he must take on (*diagonisteon,* 1), presumably over against the ways of life exemplified in the "bad" symposia he describes. Contrast this, for example, to Methodius's *Banquet of the Virgins,* which despite the homogeneity of its female Christian participants, where both the narrator and the characters explicitly mention they are engaged in a contest to give the best speech in praise of virginity, and will say to one another, "you're wrong."[9] This is much closer to Plato's paradigmatic *Symposium* in form and style than to Philo's *On the Contemplative Life*. Finally, it's hard not to be struck by the homogeneity and nonargumentativeness of the participants in Philo's ideal "good" symposia—the Therapeutae themselves—especially in light of what we know are the norms of literary symposia. Their table talk consists primarily of a single speaker, their leader, "discussing some question arising in the Holy Scriptures or solves one that has been propounded by someone

else." The audience's near perfect silence during the talk and their general accord with it is remarkable:

> His audience listens with ears pricked up and eyes fixed on him always in exactly the same posture, signifying comprehension and understanding by nods and glances, praise of the speaker by the cheerful change of expression which steals over the face, difficulty by a gentler movement of the head and by pointing with a finger-tip of the right hand....When then the President thinks he has discoursed enough and both sides feel sure they have attained their object, the speaker in the effectiveness with which his discourse has carried his aims, the audience in the substance of what they have heard, *universal applause arises showing a general pleasure* in the prospect of what is to follow.[10]

We have to take Philo's word for it that there was no disagreement among the Therapeutae, since he does not "quote" the interchange between participants in a dialogue format.

The only real difference among Therapeutae to which Philo calls attention is between the males and females:

> The feast is shared by women also, most of them aged virgins, who have kept their chastity not under compulsion, like some of the Greek priestesses, but of their own free will in their ardent yearning for wisdom...The order of reclining is so apportioned that the men sit by themselves on the right and the women by themselves on the left.[11]

Similarly, Philo notes the gendered arrangement of the men and women when they stay up all night after the banquet to sing hymns:

> They rise up all together and standing in the middle of the refectory form themselves first into two choirs, one of men and one of women, the leader and precentor chosen for each being the most honored among them and the most musical.[12]

But does he have them argue with one another at the dinner table? No! On the contrary, Philo praises the way they sing together at the table, harmoniously and antiphonally transforming their many voices into an image of unity, a "harmonious symphony, music in the truest sense" (88).

No room for the dissonance of the dialectic here! The learned table talk Philo idealizes at the Therapeutae meals is quite one-sided. One teacher expounds on Scripture, while the rest of the company listens in silence (75). Philo uses both the symposium and the choir as models of community. However, he seems to prefer the Biblically based ideal of a "single choir" in which male and female voices harmonize, "a copy [*mimema*] of the choir set up of old beside the Red Sea in honor of the wonders there wrought" to a more Platonic or Athenaean ideal of a banquet of diverse participants.[13] Dissonance, that is, arguments and contests, belong in the "bad symposia," in Philo's view, when judgment is clouded by too much wine, too fine food, too much attention to superficial appearances, too many pretty boys. Why else would otherwise wise men sow their seed in "briny fields and stony" ground (62)? In other words, it seems like Philo doesn't seem to place much value in the dramatic clash of dialectic arguments or diversity—*poikilia*. His ideal meal seems much closer to the all-Epicurean symposium of Epicurus that Athenaeus disparaged, than to Plato's *Symposium*, or even Luke's symposia of Pharisees and disciples of Jesus eating and arguing together.

In conclusion, I think Philo goes against the general tendency in the Greek and Roman tradition of literary symposia, which idealizes meals either as models for civil coexistence of ideologically different, even opposing groups, or as caricatures exaggeratedly hostile conflicts at meals as negative examples, which still implicitly assert the same social ideal of the good model meals. So then let's ask: *Why didn't Philo compose his philosophical account of the meals of the Therapeutae as a symposium dialogue?* For both Philo on one hand, and Plato and Athenaeus (representatives of the general tendency of symposium literature) on the other hand, the meal is a powerful ideological symbol, capable of uniting many into one. However, for Philo, conflict seems to be a much greater obstacle to community and unity than I think it is for Plato and Athenaeus, and all those other composers of symposium *dialogues.* Most literary symposia try to integrate the representation of differences between people of different backgrounds, dispositions, and experiences to make a dramatic, artistic unity. The end result is a creative work whose

coherence (at its best) makes us feel and imagine the unity in the many when we read or perform it. Philo takes a different tack. Philo keeps conflicts out of the meal, from both the literary form of his *composition* about the meals of the Therapeutae, and from the content of his description of those meals, which he used in particular to represent his utopian idealization of the Therapeutae community. There are no quarrels, or contests, not even *agones sophias*, among the Therapeutae, because no one who quarrels or fights is "allowed" in their community. That seems to me to be the logical and practical consequence of the particular literary choices Philo made when he engaged with the tradition of literary and philosophical symposia in order to articulate his vision of the ideal community. It's not one I'd like to be a part of (nor would I probably be welcome).

Notes

1. Philo, *On the Contemplative Life*, LCL, IX, p.151
2. Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae*, LCL, II, p.349.
3. Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae*, LCL, II, pp. 325, 327.

    > We will now talk about the Homeric symposia. In these, namely the poet distinguishes times, persons, and occasions. This feature Xenophon and Plato rightly copied, for at the beginning of their treatises they explain the occasion of the symposium, and who are present. But Epicurus specifies no place, no time; he has no introduction whatever...And further, Homer introduces guests who differ in their ages and views of life—Nestor, Ajax, Odysseus—all of whom, speaking generally strive after excellence, but have set out specifically diverse paths to find it. Epicurus, on the other hand, introduced none but the prophets of atoms, although he had before him these as his models, I mean the variety [*poikilion*] of symposia in the Poet, and the charm of Plato and Xenophon as well.

4. Philo contrasts the symposia of Plato and Xenophon to the Therapeutae's banquets:

    > Among the banquets held in Greece there are two celebrated and highly notable examples, namely those in which Socrates took part...That these deserve to be remembered was the judgment of men whose character and discourses showed them to be philosophers, Xenophon and Plato, who

described them as worthy to be recorded, surmising that they would serve to posterity as models of the happily conducted banquet. *Yet even these, if compared with those of our people who embrace the contemplative life will appears as matters of derision.....* But since the story of these well-known symposia is full of such follies, and stand self-convicted in the eyes of any who do not regard conventional opinions and the widely circulated report which declares them to have been all that they should be, *I will describe in contrast* the festal meetings of those who have dedicated their own life and themselves to knowledge and the contemplation of the verities of nature, following the truly sacred instructions of the prophet Moses. (LCL, IX, pp.147, 151);

to the Cyclopes' banquet:

I wish also to speak of their common assemblages and the cheerfulness of their convivial meals [*sumposiois*], as contrasted with those of other people [*antitaxas ta tōn allōn sumposia*]. Some people . . . bellow and rave like wild dogs, attack and bite each other and gnaw off noses, ears, fingers, and some other parts of the body, so that they make good the story of the comrades of Odysseus and the Cyclops by eating "gobbets" of men, as the poet says, and with greater cruelty. (LCL, IX, p. 137);

and to "Italian-style" banquets:

Some people may approve the method of banqueting [*tōn sumposiōn . . . diathesin*] prevalent everywhere through hankering for the Italian expensiveness and luxury emulated both by Greek and non-Greeks who make their arrangements for ostentation rather than festivity. (LCL, IX, p.141)

Philo then enumerates in gratuitous detail the excesses of these Italian-style banquets: costly couches, huge and varied spreads of meats, distinctively shaped cups and utensils, elaborately coiffed slave boys with tunics hiked up provocatively, to serve wine in abundance, to which he contrasts nearly point by point the ways of the Therapeutae, who feast on but pure fresh water and slightly seasoned and salted loaves of leavened bread, etc. (62–74 [LCL, IX, pp. 149–159]).

5. Josef Martin, *Symposion: Die Geschichte einer litearischen Form* (New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1988), "Deipnon," *RAC*.
6. See note 3 above.

7. See especially the discussion of Lucian's technique of composition in Graham Anderson, *Lucian: Theme and Variation in the Second Sophistic* (Leiden: Brill, 1976). The remark Luke attributes to Jesus in Luke. 14:12–13: "When you are having guests for lunch or supper, do not invite your friends, your brothers, or other relations [*suggeneis*], or your rich neighbors; they will only ask you back again and so you will be repaid. But when you give a party, ask the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind"—seems to be quite consistent with Athenaeus's literary aesthetic for symposia, whatever other theological connotations it may also have. *Suggeneis*, metaphorically, can mean "of the same sort." So while Luke may be making a dig at priest-like Pharisaic exclusivity by having Jesus recommend that Pharisees invite precisely those whom Biblical law excludes from participating in priestly activities—"the crippled, the lame, the blind"—could he also be suggesting that God likes a "good mix" of rich and poor, fit and unfit, family, and others at His banquet? Does the householder want his "house full" (Lk. 14:24) in the enigmatic conclusion to the parable of the Great Supper for *aesthetic* reasons, or theological ones, or some combination of the two?
8. The following scene from the *Satyricon* is clearly a parody of this technique, underlining Petronius's recognition that it was indeed a literary convention:

   We were all still wondering which way to look when a tremendous clamour arose outside the dining room, and would you believe it?—Spartan hounds began dashing everywhere, even around the table. Behind them came a great dish and on it lay a wild boar of the largest possible size, and what is more, wearing a freedman's cap on its head. From its tusks dangled two baskets woven from palm leaves, one full of fresh Syrian dates, the other of dried Theban dates. Little piglets made of cake were round as though at its dugs, suggesting that it was a brood sow now being served . . . As this was going on, I kept quiet, turning over a lot of ideas as to why the boar had come in wit a freedman's cap on it. After working through all sorts of wild fancies, I ventured to put to my experienced neighbour the question I was racking my brains with. He of course replied:

   'Even the man waiting on you could explain this obvious point—it's not puzzling at all, it's quite simple. The boar here today was pressed into service for the last course yesterday, but the guests let it go. So today it returns to the feast as a freedman.'

I damned my own stupidity and asked no more questions in case I looked like someone who had never dined in decent company. (Petronius, *The Satyricon and the Fragments*; trans. John Sullivan, 54–55 (Baltimore, MD: Penguin Books, 1965).)

9. Though many commentators do not see much substantive controversy in this symposium, Methodius certainly takes care to present his dialogue of Christian virgins in the *form* of a controversy, albeit genteel, in keeping with the participants' character. So, for example, in the narrator's preface:

   Eubolion: You are just in time Gregorion. I had just been looking for you. I wanted to find out about the meeting Marcella and Theopatra had with the other girls who attended the dinner party, and what they had to say on the subject of chastity. From what I hear, they argued so vigorously and so brilliantly that there was nothing left to be said on the topic.

   And in the body of the dialogue itself, for example,

   Then, she said, Theophila spoke as follows:

   Since Marcella has so well embarked on this discussion without adequately finishing it, I think I must try to complete the argument. Now I think she has well explained the fact that man has made slow and gradual progress towards chastity under the impulse that God has given him from time to time. *But her suggestion that from henceforth men are not to procreate children is not well stated*. (Emphases mine). (Herbert Musurillo, ed. and trans. *St. Methodius: The Symposium on Chastity*, 38, 48–49 (New York, NY: Newman Press, 1958).,

10. Philo, *On the Contemplative Life*, LCL, IX, 75, 77, 79 (pp. 159, 161, 163). This reiterates what Philo says earlier about the conduct of their "discussions" in their weekly assemblies on the seventh day, though he does not specify that these assemblies took place over meals (30–31 [LCL, IX, p. 131).
11. Philo, *On the Contemplative Life*, LCL, IX, 68–69 (p. 155).
12. Philo, *On the Contemplative Life*, LCL, IX, 83 (p. 165).
13. Philo, *On the Contemplative Life*, LCL, IX, 85 (p.165).

CHAPTER 10

Next Steps: Placing This Study of Jewish Meals in the Larger Picture of Meals in the Ancient World, Early Judaism, and Early Christianity

Dennis E. Smith

These studies taken together provide a thicker description than previously available of the meal in early Judaism as a cultural phenomenon. They establish in great detail how Jewish meals were firmly embedded in the cultural meal model of their day. While this should be neither surprising nor controversial, unfortunately it is. Traditionally, scholars have argued that neither the Jewish nor the Christian form of meal was modeled after a hellenistic and/or Roman prototype. Rather the assumption has been that the Jewish meal was a thing apart, and the Christian meal followed suit. In the light of the studies published here, it is surely time to lay those arguments to rest and to move forward toward a richer understanding of meal practices and their importance in the formative years of early Judaism and Christianity.

These studies are also part of a larger scholarly enterprise investigating meals and/or foodways across time and cultures. As noted in Thesis One of the volume's ten theses, the authors have developed an eclectic methodology utilizing not only historical models but also perspectives from sociology, anthropology, and food studies.

"Banquets" versus Ordinary Meals

The evidence for the connection between Jewish meals and Hellenistic and Roman meals is catalogued throughout these studies. A primary marker is the practice of reclining, which is evidenced at various points in the data. Once again this should not be surprising; reclining was a long-standing practice in Mediterranean culture at large.[1] To be sure, it should be pointed out that reclining was particularly appropriate for meals of significance, that is, meals at which social and religious values and ritual were prominent (thus "banquets" or "festive meals"). The reclining banquet included other components that are mentioned at various points in these studies. Among these components were libations and table talk. Other more subtle features include practices or discourse in which social ranking at the table was an issue, a matter that was embedded in the social practices of the reclining banquet but only vaguely connected with ordinary meals, if at all. Such practices also function as indicators of meals of significance and were to be expected on such occasions.

That ancients also sat at meals is not being contested, but that they sat at meals of significance, while not impossible, was rare and unusual. An example is the communal meal of the Qumran sect. It is, without doubt, a meal of significance that is heavy with social and religious values and ritual, and, as such, follows the model of the reclining meal of significance. Yet at Qumran they apparently chose to sit at their meal (1QS 6.4). What was meant by this choice merits further study.[2]

Kashrut would apparently be a crossover category, a ritual practice that would be expected at any meal, whether significant or ordinary. However, the cuisine most affected by *kashrut*, namely meat products, would primarily be associated with formal meals or meals of significance since meat products were expensive and not widely available at ordinary meals.

Contributions to Meals Research

These studies provide significant evidence for the general practice of formal meal customs in parts of the Mediterranean world

that might otherwise be considered cultural backwaters. This adds to a growing collection of data that complicate the paradigmatic description of meal practices that has been established in classical studies.

Up to this point the standard model for the formal meal, either Greek or Roman, has been associated almost entirely with Greek and Roman elites.[3] That is understandable since virtually all of the evidence has traditionally derived from elite culture. In contrast, the studies collected in this volume reinforce the point that the meal model described here represents a Mediterranean-wide phenomenon, not just a practice of the elites. Nor should the elite form of the meal any longer be implicitly considered the "pure" form, with other data being read as examples of nonelites attempting to mimic the practices belonging to the elites. The data have now proven to be too complex and widespread for such a limited perspective. Rather we now see how the various components of the meal/banquet model are defined by a diverse set of data. We need a revised paradigmatic model that extends beyond the limitations of the Greek banquet or the Roman banquet, a model that can provide a framework for redefining the categories, reach, and function(s) of the ancient meal. Such a model would be able to account for the hybrid nature of meals in our data, in which characteristics of the classic Greek form of meal (the "symposiac" model) and the Roman form of meal (the strong emphasis on ranking of positions at the table) are seen to coexist. For example, with such a model we could better account for the variations in wine ceremonies that range from the classic Greek libation to the blessing over the wine at the rabbinic table. What is shared in common is a wine ceremony; what is different is not only the deity to whom it is dedicated but also the ritual action and the words said.

Scholars have also tended to "ghetto-ize" the study of meals, classifying them either as a collection of isolated ethnic/religious cultural practices or as a curious artifact rather than a substantive dimension of Mediterranean social structures. In contrast, the studies in this book have emphasized the role of meals as significant components of social formation. They have

demonstrated how meals research needs to move to the front burner of cultural studies.

Significance for Early Judaism Research

The pivotal ten theses guiding this book are deceptively simple in form; they appear to be stating truisms. However, when put together with the accompanying explanations and essays, what emerges is a refreshing new perspective on how meals functioned as moments of social formation in early Judaism. Meals emerge as not just a convenient way to express social and religious values; rather they are shown to function as significant contributors to social and religious identity formation. Meals were embedded in their very being as a people and functioned as a major component of becoming and being Jewish in this period.

The essays on the meals of the Therapeutae reveal how well Philo understood the crucial social, religious, and theological meanings inherent in the practice and ideology of meals in the Hellenistic and Roman world. Clearly at stake in Philo's delicate yet insistent distinctions about meals were the performative meanings of Judaism in first-century Egypt.

In addition, this collection of essays makes a significant contribution to two dimensions of the identities of Jews in the first four centuries of the Common Era. First, they provide a complex portrait of the way Jews, in the face of massive Roman violence and the destruction of the Jerusalem temple, constructed identity by means of performative creativity, resistance, and accommodation through the ways they had meals together. Second, by mapping the specifics and dynamics of early Jewish meals, these studies open up new perspectives on the way in which Rabbinic Judaism used meals as a major component of its program to define what it meant to be Jewish. In doing so, the rabbis were utilizing and adapting the meal model already embedded in the culture.

The next step might well be to push the descriptive focus even further beyond Rabbinic and Philonic discourse and more toward imagining the everyday life of ordinary Jewish people. One can start with the baseline that ritual meals were already

embedded in the culture and can be reconstructed in broad strokes in the form of the ubiquitous Greek and/or Roman meal tradition. What the rabbis set out to tame and define more strictly was the already existing meal practice among the Jewish people. Culturally, meals were important to social formation in general as exhibited in such phenomena such as voluntary associations, which tended regularly to emphasize ritual meals as central to their *raison d'être*. The way the meals of associations functioned to gather diverse people together across ethnic and gender boundaries might provide a next step in understanding early Jewish appropriation and rejection of different parts of the Greek and Roman meal typologies as creatively performative of new Jewish identities.[4]

Consequently, we need to raise meals to the first level of data for defining early Judaism in process of formation, indeed, as a locus and generative force for that formation alongside the synagogue. Meals functioned not only as indicators of social formation in process but also as essential components. It is that process of formation specific to meals that could be fleshed out even more in future studies of early Judaism.

Significance for Early Christian Research

There has been a stubborn, long-standing tradition among Christian scholars to connect the early Christian meal tradition with a Jewish meal tradition defined as isolated from and opposed to a Hellenistic/Roman meal tradition. This is done, it would seem, in order to shield early Christian formation from the perceived corruption of Hellenistic influence. Connected with this is a continuing preference to connect the Christian Eucharist with the Jewish Passover tradition.[5] Thus, there has been a resistance among many New Testament scholars to the idea that early Christian meal practice was a variation of Greek and Roman meal practice. The studies in this collection, by situating Jewish meals firmly within the Mediterranean cultural model, undermine such arguments. The new perspective provided herein allows for a more fruitful investigation of the early Christian meal as a variation of the Greek and Roman cultural model just as was the Jewish meal. Alternatively, and

ironically, this perspective also allows for the Christian meal to be more appropriately analyzed as a type of Jewish meal. Like other Jewish sects, such as the Pharisees, the early Christians were adapting the Greek and Roman meal tradition according to their evolving sense of sectarian identity. Once we dispense with the idea of an isolated Jewish meal tradition and replace it with the new perspective proposed here, we can then analyze the relationship of early Christian meals to early Jewish meals in a more appropriate methodological framework.

In sum, the essays collected here have established a new perspective for research on social and identity formation in early Judaism in all its sectarian permutations, and, in the process, have broadened our understanding of the form and function of meals in the Mediterranean world of the Hellenistic and Roman periods.

Notes

1. Data collected in Matthias. Klinghardt, *Gemeinschaftsmahl und Mahlgemeinschaft: Soziologie und Liturgie frühchristlicher Mahlfeiern*. Texte und Arbeiten zum neutestamentlichen Zeitalter 13. (Tübingen: Francke Verlag, 1996), 75–83; Dennis E. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist:The Banquet in the Early Christian World* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003),14–18.
2. Lawrence Schiffman suggested that they rejected the reclining posture because it was connected with Greco-Roman practices, whereas sitting was consistent with the biblical tradition (*The Eschatological Community of the Dead Sea Scrolls; A Study of the Rule of the Congregation* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series, 1989), 56. However, it is more likely that reclining was so fully embedded in the cultural meal model that no one would have assumed it was a foreign practice. The choice of sitting should rather be analyzed in the light of cultural values in relation to sitting versus reclining.
3. See especially Katherine M. D. Dunbabin, *The Roman Banquet: Images of Conviviality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).
4. On the social function of meals of associations, see Ascough, "Social and Political Characteristics of Greco-Roman Association Meals" and "Forms of Commensality in Greco-Roman Associations"; in *Meals in the Early Christian World: Social Formation, Experimentation,*

and Conflict at the Table, ed. D. E. Smith and H. Taussig (New York: Palgrave MacMillian, 2012); Philip Harland, *Associations, Congregations, and Synagogues: Claiming a Place in Ancient Mediterranean Society* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2003); Klinghardt, *Mahlgemeinschaft und Gemeinschaftsmahl,* 48–72, 112–124; Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist,* 87–131; Hal Taussig, *In the Beginning Was the Meal: Social Experimentation and Early Christian Identity* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2009), 122–167.

5. Still influential is Joachim Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus* (London: SCM Press, 2011). Note that he based his argument partially on the practice of reclining at both the Last Supper and the Passover meal (48–49).

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