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The Geonic Commentary on the Passover Haggadah

By

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Referees, Prof. Richard Sarason and Prof. Mark Washofsky

Digest

The Haggadah is one of the most important and well-known texts of Jewish liturgy. Even though the origins of the Seder go back many centuries ago, the ritual of the Seder as we know it today is due to the effort of a group of Jewish scholars, the *geonim* who, between the eighth and the tenth centuries, set the standards for a unified text for the Haggadah.

This thesis collects all the texts in the geonic corpus connected with the Haggadah. The primary sources are Lewin's *'Otzar ha-Geonim*, and the *siddurim* produced by Amram (d. 871) and Saadiah (d. 942). This material is organized according to the traditional rubrics of the Seder, in such a way that the final product looks like an actual geonic "commentary" on the Haggadah, even though the *geonim* never wrote such a commentary. I also trace the state of the matter by the time of the closure of Babylonian Talmud, to show which "unresolved" issues were elaborated by the *geonim*, and what constitutes their *hiddushim* in response to new issues brought to them by the various *she'elot* they received during their tenure as heads of the talmudic academies of Sura and Pumbedita.

The uniqueness of this work resides in the fact that a comprehensive account of the range of opinions of the *geonim* on the Haggadah is available for the first time in English.

*To my "mamá",
Celia Di Natale, zikhronah li-vrakhah*

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*eloheinu melej ha-'olam, shehejeianu, ve-kiyemanu, ve-higiyanu la-z'man
ha-zeh.*

Introduction

The popularity of the Passover Haggadah can hardly be overestimated. The number of editions, printings, and reprints of the Haggadah are overwhelming. Its popularity might be due to a combination of factors: its clarity of language, its artistic embellishment, and, over all, its ability to successfully express the primordial myth of the Jewish people. Passover, perhaps more than any other Jewish festival, draws its ritual effectiveness from the extraordinary character of the constitutive event of the people: its deliverance from Egypt which led to Sinai, and finally to the promised land. In sum, talking about the Haggadah means talking about redemption, both past and future. This fact accounts for the constant interest that the *geonim*, and other Jewish sages before and after them, had in clarifying, explaining, and contemporizing the text of the Haggadah.

The number of commentaries produced by Jewish scholars over the roughly one thousand years which separate us from the geonic period is impressive. Almost every important rabbinic authority had to have his very own Haggadah, which would usually incorporate his halachic as well as aggadic interpretations of the text. Fewer and fewer, after the *geonim*, are the commentaries that contain divergent textual

versions of the Haggadah. Even though additions were made in the course of the Middle Ages, the traditional text of the Haggadah as we know it today is a product of geonic decisions on the matter.

The *geonim* themselves are in a privileged historical position. They are the natural heirs of the Babylonian Talmudic authorities, verily standing on the shoulders of giants looking down upon all the other Jewish communities elsewhere, even upon that of the Land of Israel. Their interpretations of the Talmud as well as their rulings in newly-raised halachic matters gained increasing prestige in the seventh century, until finally in the ninth century they became the unchallenged religious authorities (authority which would not last more than a hundred years until it was challenged by the Karaites). The impact of the *geonim* on later generations of scholars was long lasting, and most of the *rishonim* quoted them as sources of religious practice and correct opinion.

Having shown on the one hand, how important the text of the Haggadah is for the Jewish religion, and on the other hand, in how high regard the *geonim* have been held among talmudic scholars, it is surprising that the range of geonic opinions concerning the Haggadah has not been the object of hundreds of works. On the contrary, there are very few works (maybe only two)¹ which specifically deal with the geonic

opinions on the Haggadah as their main theme. However, in neither of these works did the author attempt to provide an exhaustive presentation of a geonic commentary to the Haggadah *per se*, i.e., as a resource for someone else who might be looking to know if, in the texts available to us, the *geonim* had anything to say about a particular rubric of the Seder. Hoffman mainly focused on the halachic material in the corpus of geonic responsa concerning the standardization of the liturgy rather than on the range of geonic opinions regarding the text of the Haggadah by itself as the object of a textual and interpretative commentary. This thesis intends to address the scholarly need for a single volume, which contains a comprehensive survey and analysis of the geonic corpus concerning the text of the Passover Haggadah.

Hoffman's work is still fundamental for a careful understanding of when, how and, mainly, why there is one single and fixed canonical text for the night of the Seder. Therefore, I shall take into consideration Hoffman's conclusions on the matter as my starting point. The first realization that one must bear in mind is that the issue of one single, fixed liturgy for the Seder night was still fluctuating during the geonic period. This was due to the conscious and premeditated attempt on the part of the some geonic authorities, such as Natronai, Saadiah, and Amram, to suppress those textual practices deemed inappropriate. The standarization of the textual traditions of the Haggadah in the geonic

period can account for the proliferation of more or less homogeneous texts during the centuries immediately following the geonic period.

One of the major problems in dealing with this kind literature is the system of documentation that the scholars of the Middle Ages used when quoting their sources. This problem is magnified in the case of geonic literature. Except for the writings of Saadiah and Amram who left detailed liturgical responsa of great help for my inquiry, all the rest of the opinions had to be collected here and there in the literature of the *rishonim*. Even Saadiah's and Amram's texts are not exempted from contamination of later practices, and at times it is difficult to distinguish which halachic decisions or practice are geonic and which developed later on. The textual fragments found in the Cairo Genizah have contributed to some extent to the research in *geonica*, but not enough material has been found yet in order to corroborate the "authenticity" of the totality of the geonic corpus. Yet we have no way to know if the author of *Sefer ha-Manhig* or Eliezer ben Yehudah Kalonimos, two or three centuries after the *geonim* had been extinguished, presented their ideas in a trustworthy manner. Even when they were well intentioned in transmitting the teachings of the geonic authorities, one cannot simply trust the nobility of *shalshelet ha-kabbalah* if one wants to keep the scope of this thesis within the limits of scientific rigor. I shall assume that the opinions found in the geonic corpus are only *attributed* to such

and such *gaon*. Even when I shall use phrases such as “Amram says,” or “Natronai taught,” they must be understood as figures of speech, and I only mean to say that such opinion is attributed to the geonic authority in question. I consider this clarification of language necessary, mainly because I have not come across it in the various critical editions of geonic *responsa*, which I consulted in preparation for this thesis. I think that attributing a certain opinion to a *gaon* does have a definite impact for a *posek*; it is certainly more critical for a *teshuvah* to draw conclusions with the support of a *gaon* than without it. However, the authoritative function of geonic opinions in Jewish traditional religious law should not hasten us to conclude that we know what the *geonim really* taught. All this is simply to say that my conclusions will be tentative mainly because the sources I’m working with are difficult to grasp due to the problems in their transmission *mi-dor le-dor*.

For the purpose of this thesis, I shall conceptually distinguish between the Haggadah and the Seder, the first being strictly the name of a text; the latter, referring to a ritual in which actions in addition to the recitation (or chanting) of prescribed formulaic texts are involved. This distinction becomes relevant in the light of what Hoffman has thoroughly shown: that the *geonim* were very concerned with the *nusah* used for the Seder, and to a great extent made every effort to promote the textual practices of the two *yeshivot*. Notice that this distinction is, of course, a

conceptual one, given that the Haggadah was still in a fluid state during the geonic period. It was only under the influence of the *geonim* that one finds the first attempts at a Haggadah, i.e., a real book from which the leader of the Seder would conduct the ritual of the eve of Passover. The closest one can get to a full Haggadah are the versions found in *Seder Rav Amram* and *Siddur Saadiah* from the ninth and tenth century respectively (as well as some genizah fragments of old *Haggadot*);² however, it is debatable to what extent these texts constitutes *Haggadot* that were actually used at a Seder table. Anyway, the opinions attributed to the *geonim* regarding both the Haggadah and the Seder have been preserved.

The thesis is divided in two major parts. Part one deals with the traditional rubrics of the Seder,³ and part two with those aspects of the Seder which by their own nature are “cross-rubrical.”

As I mentioned before, the *geonim* are in a privileged position vis à vis rabbinic Judaism. They built their halachic decision based on a close reading of the Talmud in the light of the traditional knowledge accumulated in the academies of Sura and Pumbedita. Since they drew so heavily on talmudic sources, it will be important to begin the presentation of each section with a selected exposition of the state of the matter by the time of the closure of the Talmud in the sixth century. This

will imply a review of the unresolved issues in tannaitic literature, including both Mishnah and Tosefta, and in amoraic literature, i.e., the two *talmudim*.

The discussion of the antecedents of geonic literature will be followed by an exhaustive exposition and analysis of the geonic answers to the issues that were left “unresolved” in rabbinic sources whenever possible. Finally, I shall deal with those issues raised only in geonic literature in response to *she’elot* sent to the *geonim* by different Jewish communities.

The exposition and analysis of all the geonic sources published until today will provide the reader with a clear idea of the range of opinions regarding both the Haggadah and the Seder during a critical and defining stage of their development.

Part I: The Traditional Rubrics of the Seder

Kadesh

In chapter 10 of Mishnah Pesahim we find what is probably the earliest mention of the use of wine in connection with the ritual for the celebration of Pesah on the night of the 14th of Nissan. The text of the Mishnah mentions four cups of wine, but says nothing about the rationale for that number. Stein and other scholars have suggested, based on the analysis of classical Greek and Latin symposia literature, that the Seder resembles, and presupposes acquaintance with, the classical symposia;⁴ however, on the issue of the numbers of cups Stein affirms:

[...] Antiphanes' saying that one should honour the gods to the extent of three cups might perhaps be quoted, though nobody would claim any direct influence on the four cups of the Haggadah.⁵

There is evidence in classical literature that in fact more than three cups of wine was deemed inappropriate. Atheneaus, who lived in Rome by the

end of the second century and the beginning of the third century of the Common Era, writes in his *Deipnosophistae*:

Eubulus makes Dionysus say: "Three bowls only do I mix for the temperate –one to health, which they empty first, the second to love and pleasure, the third to sleep. When this is drunk up the wise guest go home. The fourth bowl is ours no longer, but belongs to violence."⁶

Atheneaus description of the symposium seems to indicate that it was an accepted practice among educated members of the senatorial and intellectual Roman elite to measure the progression of the symposia according to the cups of wine. This practice is certainly related to the Seder; however, there is no indication that the number of cups (four or five) was based on symposia literature. Moreover, from Atheneaus account, it would seem that by prescribing four cups the rabbis were *not* paying much attention to what a proper symposium should be.⁷

Bokser, for his part, who opposes any attempt to connect the Seder with the symposia in any manner other than generally, also affirms that "the Passover drinking of wine differs from that of the symposium" for several reason related to the specifics of the Seder.⁸ In any event, the geonic authorities relied solely on traditional rabbinic literature, so we examine first what the tannaim had to say about the *kiddush*.

Chapter 10 of Mishnah Pesahim presents a ritualistic situation in which the reader already is supposed to know the dynamics of the celebration, and needs only some further specifications as to how to proceed. The Mishnah also records a dispute between the schools of Hillel and Shammai as to what should be the appropriate order of the blessings for wine and for the day.⁹ Having this recorded in the Mishnah might mean that the dispute between the schools was still undecided; however, this dispute, like others attested in the Mishnah, might have been transmitted for the purpose of study, for instance. In any case, we know that in general the Halachah (the *halakhah lema'aseh*) follows *Bet Hillel*, regardless of what the text of the Mishnah that we have today says concerning this dispute. It is in the Tosefta where we find the explicit ruling that the *halakhah* follows the opinion of the House of Hillel in this instance.¹⁰

Later on, the Babylonian Talmud elaborates on some of the issues present already in the Mishnah and on some others that were unique to the approach of the Amoraic authorities.

In tractate Pesahim 107a we find a *baraita* that clearly says that one should make *kiddush* only with wine. However, immediately after it, we see the divergent opinion of R. Eleazar b. R. Simeon, who allows the use of beer as well. Beer or bread which, under certain circumstances

and by some authorities, were deemed suitable for *kiddush*, are out of question for Pesah. One also has to bear in mind what R. Judah b. Bethyra said: "... but now that the Temple is no longer in existence, there is no rejoicing save with wine."¹¹ So what should we use if wine is not available at all or is not available in the quantities required to fulfill the commandment of drinking four cups of wine on the night of the Seder? Wine was easily acquired in the Land of Israel when the rabbinic movement originated and where the Mishnah and the Tosefta were produced, but it was scarce in Babylonia. In the specific case of Pesah, the four cups of wine are *hovah*, obligatory on the first night, so how are people to fulfill this *mitzvah* when wine is scarce? The answer to this practical question is partially what motivated the geonic Responsa on the issue of the suitability of beverages other than wine for the four cups of the Seder.

The Talmud Yerushalmi recognized the problem that Jews faced in Babylonia regarding the availability of wine. In Yerushalmi Pesahim 10:2 (cf. also Yerushalmi Berakhot 8:1, where beer is considered as a substitute for wine) we read: "Said R. Yose b. R. Bun, 'They are accustomed [in Babylonia that] wherever they do not have wine, the prayer leader goes before the ark and says one benediction that

comprises seven.” In Yerushalmi Pesahim 10:1 we find a tannaitic statement that reads:

On a festival, a man is required to make his wife and children happy. With what does he make them happy? With wine. R. Judah says, “Women with what is appropriate for them; and children, with what is appropriate for them” [which is a parallel text to *Tosefta* 10:4).

I follow Bokser¹² in understanding this *baraita*, even when it doesn’t explicitly mention *kiddush*, to refer to the requirement of drinking wine as part of the *kiddush*. Whether the *geonim* were thinking about this *baraita* when they extended the definition of beverages permissible for *kiddush* (and the four cups) is hard to tell; however, this text might have set a precedent for achieving a broader definition of *simḥah* in general, not only restricted to the drinking of wine.

One of the first problems that the *geonim* had to face was the unavailability of wine in certain geographical regions where Jews had settled earlier in the postalmudic era and where communities flourished by the time the *geonim* sought to exercise their influence in Jewish law and practice. One of these communities prospered in North Africa. The Jewish religious authorities of Kairouan must have been aware of the talmudic passage mentioned above (Pesahim 107a) when they sent a

she'elah to the *geonim* seeking for advice regarding the practice of making *kiddush* and drinking the four cups during the Seder in the event that wine is not available.¹³ In a responsum by Rav Hai Gaon (d. 1038) and reproduced in other geonic *teshuvot*¹⁴, he stated that one should prepare a mixture with raisins and water which would replace wine. One fulfills the commandment for the purpose of the four cups (including the *kadesh* cup) by drinking "raisin-wine" (*yayin tzimukim*). This raisin-wine cannot be contaminated with any other component; it has to be strictly defined as grapes and water. It is as if the *geonim* were concerned with a permissive ruling such as this. Rav Hai seems to define the suitable beverage to make *kiddush* on the night of the Seder as anything that tastes like *yayin*, or is related to it via grapes, regardless of the technical procedure involved in its manufacture. Hai's reasoning probably follows the talmudic discussion in *Baba Batra* 97a-b. We find there a statement attributed to R. Zutra bar Tuviah and Rav: "One should not pronounce *kiddush* except over [the kind of] wine suitable for a libation on the altar." The *stam* Talmud poses the question as to what extent other beverages are also excluded. They listed several substitutes for wine that one might think Rav would have rejected. The general reasoning follows the distinction between, on the one hand, wine for libations and wine for *kiddush*, and on the other, wine brought at the outset (*milekhat~~h~~ilah*) and wine brought after the fact (*bideavad*). The consensus (following Rashi's

commentary *ad loci*) is that whatever beverages one is allowed to bring after the fact as a libation to accompany a sacrifice, would be allowed to be used at the outset for *kiddush ha-yom*; the reason being that the sacrificial cult is seen by the authorities on this talmudic passage as being more important than the *kiddush*. In Bavli Pesahim 97b, the Talmud specifically mentions raisin-wine as a fit option for libation after the fact. From this statement Hai (and other *poskim* after him) presumably derived the suitability of *yayin tzimukim* for the Seder's *kiddush*.

As we pointed out earlier, it is permissible to make *kiddush* on Shabbat using other types of food or beverage besides wine, all of which contain *hametz* (bread, beer). The problem with Pesah is that one has to balance the positive commandment of making *kiddush* with the negative commandment which forbids the possession (let alone the consumption) of aliments with *hametz*. The geonic solution to this dilemma is to take the same basic element used to make wine, i. e., grapes, and permit it in any of its variations which might be available at the moment of the celebration of the Seder.

There are certain issues about which we only have textual evidence from the Geonic period onwards. As Hoffman has extensively shown¹⁵, some of the *geonim* had a preoccupation with defining the normative

forms of the liturgy. In a *she'elah* sent by the Jews of Kairouan and addressed to Rav Natronai Gaon¹⁶, they included a version of the text of the *kiddush* that they used for the Seder. Their version includes an elaborate, almost payetanic, version of the *kiddush* for *leil pesah*. Intertwined with this version we find also the standard *kiddush* as we know it today. In his answer, Natronai dismisses their version. He writes:

"They err because there is only one version of the *kiddush* for all the holidays, except that each of them includes also the [mention] of the special occasion [such as Pesah, Shavuot, Rosh Hashanah, etc.]"¹⁷

This expanded version of the *kiddush* is rejected by some of the *geonim* and not found in the traditional Haggadah¹⁸ (Saadia, however, includes a payetanic insertion for the *nusah* of the *kiddush* which he qualifies as *mutar le'emo*)¹⁹

In addition to this discussion, *Sefer Halakhot Gedolot*²⁰ and *Seder Rav Amram*²¹ make reference to the issue of a person who is some kind of itinerant *mekadesh*. This person would go from house to house reciting the *kiddush* and the Haggadah. Presumably in the time of the *geonim*, the text of the Haggadah was not yet totally fixed and written down, and they had religious agents who, very much in priestly or rabbinic fashion,

performed the ritual for the public. Now these agents faced a problem when it came to *kiddush* and drinking wine. It becomes clear out of the Talmudic discussion that every Jewish adult should drink at least four cups of wine on the eve of Pesah, but what if there is someone who perhaps, because of special knowledge or training, has to drink more than four cups?

The responsum found in *Sefer Halachot Gedolot* finds acceptable the practice of making more than one *kiddush* and of reciting the Haggadah up to the *hallel* section, that is to say up to eating the meal. Once the person is ready to go ahead and finish the Seder from *hallel* onwards, he cannot go back and recite *kiddush* again. Actually, as represented in the responsum, the issue has to do with *birkat ha-mazon*. Since one is not supposed to drink any wine between the third and the fourth cups –as long as one doesn't recite *birkat ha-mazon*, one can go on making *kiddush* for others; however, once one recites *birkat ha-mazon*, one may not do so. Moreover, the responsum might refer to a case of contradictory *mitzvot* as well. On the one hand once you have recited *kiddush* you have in fact sanctified the day (whether it were Shabbat or Yom tov), and hence one shouldn't do it again. On the other hand, we know that adult Jews are commanded to have a Seder and to perform all the *mitzvot* associated with it. Therefore, if they are unable to do it by

themselves, they need someone else to do it for them, someone who can fulfill *their* obligation on *their* behalf.

Both are very respectable principles. The *geonim* found a way to harmonize these principles by qualifying the different stages of the Seder, and by pointing out that certain parts are not quite “completed” in the same way that we would usually do them (like washing the hands and eating bread, or saying *boreh peri ha-gafen* and immediately drinking wine). The regular and accepted order of the blessing in a festive meal is: *kiddush*, *netilah*, *ha-motzi*. Assuming that the Seder is a festive meal, its character is quite “unusual.” It well might have been that this character was what gave them the freedom to say that someone can go around from house to house reciting *kiddush*, something that otherwise would have violated the standard way of making *kiddush* on Shabbat eve, for instance.

Rahatz

According to Kasher²² the explanation for the custom of first washing the hands before eating greens is to be found in the Talmud. Notwithstanding, there is a description of a banquet in Tosefta Pisha 4:8²³ according to which it was customary to enter into a waiting area

first, eat some hors d'oeuvres, and before eating wash hands. This description, however, is not recalled in later discussions of the issue in Amoraic literature as the source of the practice, and it is certainly not the case in geonic literature.

What seems to be the source for the geonic discussions of the issue is to be found in the Talmud. In Bavli Pesahim 115a we find the opinion of R. Eleazar and R. Oshayah that "any [food] that is eaten at a banquet requires *netilat yadayim*". Therefore, according to this opinion, since the Seder is a banquet, one should say the blessing over the first washing (i. e., before eating *karpas*). The reason, brought next, for this practice is attributed to R. Papa who explains that it is because of the dipping in *haroset*, and in this way he is still in agreement with the opinion of R. Eleazar. The Talmud Bavli registers the opinion of a Palestinian Amora, Rabbana Urka, quoted by R. Hisda, regarding the requirement of washing the hands before both dippings, i. e., the one before the *karpas* and *maror* blessings. However, the *stam* Talmud is not convinced that one has to wash again after reciting the Haggadah since the one conducting the Seder did not stand up and depart from the table but rather he remained seated all the time, i.e. there is no *hefsek*. R. Papa however, gives what later came to be the standard rabbinic answer for washing the hands twice during the Seder, namely that the Haggadah, i. e., the *magid* section of the Seder, and the *hallel* rubric are

considered an interruption. R. Papa says, "He might let his thoughts wander [not think about keeping his hands clean] and touch [something unclean]".²⁴ In these two references to *raḥatz* in the Babylonian Talmud, there is no mention of the issue of the *berakhot* that should accompany the washing of the hands. Apparently, it would be natural to conclude that one needs to say the blessing *al netilat yadayim* twice during the Seder, otherwise, what else do the rabbis mean when they say that one should ritually wash his hands before both dippings? But maybe natural reasoning is not the preferred one in the case of Talmudic interpretation, and it is certainly not the case with the *geonim*. So, is one supposed to say the blessing twice? The *geonim* were compelled to answer such a question, maybe because duplication of *berakhot* didn't sound like a rabbinic practice to them.

In his *siddur*,²⁵ R. Amram expressed the talmudic opinion that one has to say the blessing over the washing of the hands that occurs during this rubric of the Seder, i.e., before *karpas*. If the washing of the hands is for the sake of eating bread then one must certainly say the blessing. According to R. Hisda and Rabana in Bavli Pesahim 115b one has to say the blessing *al netilat yadayim* twice: once before the first *tibbul*, i. e., before the *karpas* rubric, and another time before the second *tibbul*, i. e., before eating the bitter herbs. Even when R. Amram differed from today's practice²⁶ in that he prescribed the blessing for both hand washing, he

along with R. Natronai and R. Sar Shalom²⁷ didn't accept the practice of other *geonim* who not only used to say a blessing after *mayim aḥaronim*, the washing of the hands after the meal, but who also used three different wordings for each of the washings during the Seder night. Amram's reasoning is that since during the other days of the year one doesn't have different wordings for the various washings of the hands, therefore one is supposed to say the canonized blessing *al netilat yadayim* and not the other ones, i.e., *al raḥitzat yadayim* or *al shetifat yadayim*.

Karpas

The source for this section of the Haggadah is to be found in Mishnah Pesahim 10:3: "They served him –he dips the lettuce (*ḥzrt*) [the vegetable used for the bitter herbs] before he reaches the bread condiment."²⁸ The Tosefta doesn't mention "lettuce" as what is dipped in salt but rather "innards"²⁹ (*bene me'ayim*) which the servant presents to the guest apparently right after the *kiddush*. In any case, it seems that there was some kind of appetizer eaten before the actual *se'udah*, and this custom was continued in later generations. The tannaitic evidence we have doesn't agree on what kind of food should be used for the first dipping.

The issue of eating bitter herbs at the time of *karpas* (and again at the time of *maror*) raised the issue of intention (*kavanah*) in performing *mitzvot*. The discussion is recorded in Bavli Pesahim 114b, in the name of Resh Lakish. The issue there is, if someone recites the blessing *bore peri ha-'adamah* over *hazeret* (i.e. bitter herbs) is he fulfilling the commandment of eating *maror* on the night of Seder? Soon, the reasoning concerning the presence or absence of *kavanah* is abandoned (though only momentarily) for that of appropriateness of the practice of dipping lettuce at this stage of the Seder for the sake of the children. As the Tosafot *ad loci* many centuries later explained, "...this is to stimulate the child's wonder, as it is unusual to commence a meal thus." The question still remains: is the wonder caused by the dipping itself or by the choice of lettuce as the fresh vegetable? The rhetorical question introduced by the phrase *ve-khi teimah* in Pesahim 114b seems to imply that there are other vegetables which are suited for *karpas*, and that the mention of lettuce in the Mishnah is to teach us that "even lettuce requires double dipping." I think that this rhetorical question makes possible the inclusion of other vegetables under the category of those suitable for *karpas* in the subsequent Talmudic commentaries. The issue remains: Which vegetables other than lettuce (which is problematic *vis à vis* the later rubrics of the Seder) is one allowed to use for *karpas*? The *geonim* will elaborate on this point.

Actually, the word *karpas*, used today for the third rubric of the Seder, presupposes an halachic decision, namely, that the first *tibbul* is to be made with a fresh vegetable other than *maror*, which reflects the later development of the practical Halachah in post-talmudic literature.

Both R. Amram and R. Saadiah agreed on the procedure for this rubric: one should say the blessing *bore peri ha-'adamah*, and dip the vegetable(s) in *haroset*.³⁰ Saadiah prescribed any kind of vegetable except for *maror*, perhaps because by his time it was clear that there were a variety of vegetables suitable for *karpas* but he was trying to discourage people from using *maror* as the only fresh vegetable of the Seder. In any case, he didn't give a reason why so, but it's probably because if one were to eat *maror* this early in the Seder, then one could not say the blessing over *maror* later on (since in that case it would be a *berakhah le-vatalah*). Furthermore, it's a toraitic obligation (*hovah*) to eat *maror* and this practice goes back to the times of the Second Temple when the Passover sacrifice was eaten together with *maror*, and probably it is better to reserve the eating of *maror* for its prescribed position in the Seder. Amram, earlier than Saadiah, is more specific regarding the kinds of vegetables that one can use for *karpas*. He mentioned *hammah*, *hasah*, *gargirah*, *karpesa*, and *kusbartah* (according to Jastrow³¹ "radish," "lettuce," "rocket," "parsley," and "coriander" respectively). It could be the

case that the only fresh vegetable one has is *maror*, and this might have been the case in certain regions where the Jews lived in the time of Amram. Some devoted Jews, in some inhospitable region might have found it difficult to obtain vegetables in general, but since *maror* is a toraitic obligation (and *karpas* is not), they might have managed with great difficulty to get some *maror*. Should they used it *milekhatilah* for *karpas*? Amram's answer seems to be yes, but one should say the blessings *bore peri ha-'adamah* and the *le-echol maror*³² at the time of *karpas*, and later eat *maror* only at the *korech* rubric without saying the blessing.

Yahatz

It would seem as though the *geonim* had no other source for this rubric than contemporary practice, i.e., the origin of this rubric seems to be a popular custom and not the logical consequence based on some previous tannaitic or amoraic text(s).

R. Natronai and Amram prescribed that one should divide the *matzah* in two parts without pronouncing the blessing over bread, and place it on the table immediately before beginning with the *magid* section.³³ The omission of *ha-motzi* might be due to the obvious reason

that at this point in the Seder one is not supposed to eat the *matzah*. In any other meal when we “break” the bread it’s because we are about to eat it; however, on the night of the Seder, there are other steps to be taken before we fulfill the commandment of eating the *matzah* (which on the eve of Passover is in fact a different action from that of eating bread). So if we were to pronounce the blessing before the *magid*, this step would constitute an interruption between *ha-motzi* and the eating of bread, which concurrently contradicts the general principle that if a blessing of *mitzvah* is said, the ritual action mentioned in the blessing immediately follows it. Strangely enough Saadiah, who lived less than a century after Amram and who was also the gaon of the talmudic academy from Surah, doesn’t mention this step of the Seder. He does have the leader of the Seder lift the *matzah* right before the *ha shatah* section which might be an action identifiable with the *yahatz*, but I cannot be sure of that from reading Saadiah’s text. It is possible, though, that these are two alternative gestures which call attention to the *matzah* and its symbolism at the very outset of the *magid* recitation.

Magid

The opening paragraph of the *magid* section in today’s Haggadah seems to have originated in popular custom rather than the rabbinic ruling.³⁴

We find fragments of it in Saadiah's *siddur* but no comment on why it is there. R. Matitiahu bar mar Rabbi (elevated to the geonate of Pumbedita in 860)³⁵ was aware of the practice of reciting the second sentence of this paragraph. He even attributed it to *minhag avot*. The *minhag* in question involved leaving the door open during the Seder meal, so poor Jews could come in and fulfill the commandments of Pesah; those letting them in would get a reward for their good deed.³⁶ He also acknowledges that in his time when most Jews live among non-Jews one is supposed to feed the needy of gentiles (*'aku''m*) and then celebrate the Seder.

It would seem that the practice of leaving the doors of the house unlocked (or open) during on the eve of Passover was quite common. According to the *Ma'seh rokeah* of Eliezer b. Judah of Worms (ca. 1165-1230),³⁷ it was the custom of the father of the *amora* Mar Rabina to leave the doors of the house where they were celebrating the Seder unlocked, so that when the prophet Elijah comes, they could rush out to welcome the Messiah. Eliezer b. Judah explains that, "it is written (Ex. 12:42) that it was for Adonai a night of vigil [to bring them out of the land of Egypt; that same night is Adonai's, one of vigil for all children of Israel throughout the ages], a night set aside (*meshumar*) since the time of creation." The implication being that, since the redemption from Egypt is the prototype for the future redemption in messianic times, the future redemption will occur during Passover. Mar Rabina continues explaining

that it is because of the faith that our ancestors had in God that they would be delivered.

Likewise Rabenu Nissim b. Jacob (c.990-1062, probably in his lost work *Megillat Setarim* completed in 1051 at the latest)³⁸ in the name of his father (Jacob b. Nissim Ibn Shahin) comments that one should not lock the doors of the house while celebrating the Seder because God has promised us that on account of our ancestors' faith we shall be rewarded with redemption.³⁹ Even though the custom of opening the door during the recitation of *shfokh hamat'kha* certainly developed much later than the geonic period, the custom of opening the door for Elijah or simply hoping for the final redemption to happen at any time was an attested practice in the time of R. Nissim, and perhaps earlier. Even though R. Nissim attributed this practice to the geonic period, there is no attestation of such a practice in geonic literature.

In Mishnah Pesahim 10:4 we find a version of the *mah nishtanah* text which in the standard Haggadah marks the opening of the *magid* section. In the mishnaic text it's not clear what the actual liturgical use of these questions should be. It could be that these words were to be recited just as they are or they might have been exemplary of the kinds of questions that needed to be asked during the course of the Seder. In any case, the Mishnah doesn't mention at all that these words could have

been used by a child to ask his father about the oddities of the Seder meal, which is precisely how they subsequently have been used. This Mishnah seems to be acting here as a direct commentary on the Toraitic dictum: "and when, in time to come, your son asks you" (Ex. 13:14).

This Mishnah also contains a general indication as to how to proceed during the *magid*: "one should begin with [words of] degradation and end with [words of] praise." This simple indication, by means of being so general, will produce great discussion among later authorities as to which specifics the *tannaim* intended when they say *genut*. Did they mean slavery in Egypt? Idolatry? Both?

The Tosefta doesn't deal with this section of the Seder. However, in Pisha 10:7 we read in reference to the recitation of the *hallel*: "He who recites for his sons and daughters" From this reference we see that the Tosefta also addresses the role of children at the Seder. By the time Saadiah wrote his *siddur* the accepted practice was that the son (*yeled bar da'at*) is supposed to ask the questions beginning with *mah nishtanah*.

The *gemara* in Pesahim 116a reflects the normative Babylonian practice of not dipping the food before eating at all. "R. Safra teaches thus: We [Jews in Babel] do not dip even once, whereas this night [we dip] twice." Presumably it is because of this custom that the text of the

mah nishtanah is emended by the geonic authorities, and began appearing as we know it today.

The so-called *baraita de-arbah banim* found in Yerushalmi Pesahim 10:4⁴⁰ supplements and comments on the Mishnah's reference to the child's asking questions. This passage seems to be an insertion within the *mah nishtanah* text itself; however, this is not how it was understood by the *geonim* later on, who presented this "version of a wisdom typology of four types of children"⁴¹ later in the *magid* section.

Bavli Pesahim gives us the standard interpretation of what constitutes *genut*.⁴² According to Rav one should begin the exposition of the *magid* with "Aforetime our ancestors...", including the verses from Jos. 24, and according to Sh'muel one should begin with "We were slaves" and then recount the deliverance from Egypt. The basic dispute is whether *genut* refers to idolatry or to slavery. There is no resolution to this dispute recorded in the Talmud.

The *gemara* in Yerushalmi Pesahim 10:5⁴³ records Rav's opinion that one should begin by mentioning idolatry, following Joshua's model in tracing the ignoble origins of the Jewish people to the idolatrous background of our ancestors. It is difficult to tell whether the Yerushalmi reflects the practice of the Land of Israel regarding the beginning of the

magid section (and therefore, a resolution in the Rav/Sh'muel dispute) or if we just don't have a text which preserves Sh'muel's opinion.

According to Natronai⁴⁴ (whose responsum censured those who only recite the passage from Jos. 24 and neglected the recitation of "We were slaves", which is in fact a Palestinian rabbinite custom, and certainly not Karaite as he alleged),⁴⁵ and from the text presented in Amram's and Saadiah's *siddurim*, it appears that the dispute between Rav and Sh'muel regarding the interpretation of *genut*, as well as which passage should open the answering section of the *magid*, has been harmonized by incorporating both passages into the text of the Haggadah. According to Goldschmidt,⁴⁶ the *geonim* placed the passage "We were slaves" before Rav's choice probably because they followed later Amoraic authorities such as R. Nachman.⁴⁷ It is worth noting that we have no text from the geonic period in which the closing words of the *avadim hayinu* section are mentioned, namely, from "Even were we all sages..." up to "it is praiseworthy."⁴⁸

Unfortunately, we have no geonic commentary on the Midrashic sections of the *magid* other than the attesting of such elaboration in the *siddurim* from that period or elsewhere.⁴⁹ Some scholars,⁵⁰ speculated that the "proto-poem" *dayenu* was probably not written specifically for the Seder (notice that it doesn't mention *genut* at all), but rather as an

hymn that accompanied the bringing of first-fruits during the Second Temple period (according to Goldschmidt, during the last century of existence of the Temple). In today's Haggadah text, the *piyyut* called "kamah ma'alot tovot" (a. k. a. *dayenu*), and its prosaic version (which is probably the more original composition of both), come right before the Mishnaic passage on R. Gamaliel; now, strangely enough, in *Siddur Rav Saadiah*⁵¹ they come after the second cup, with an indication that one should say the paragraph beginning with *R. Yosi ha-galili 'omer* before one says *R. Gamaliel 'omer*. Moreover, they are not mentioned at all by Maimonides in his account of the Haggadah text. According to Goldschmidt "Saadiah placed them at the end of the Haggadah in order to distinguish between an obligatory (*hovah*) and an optional (*reshut*) recitation."⁵² Certainly these passages are not mentioned in the Mishnah or in any of the *talmudim*, and that might be the reason why they are optional. Saadiah specifically mentions that there are three texts whose recitation is to be considered *mutar*. They are:

- a. A payetanic expansion of the *kiddush*;
- b. An insertion before *R. Gamaliel 'omer*, beginning with "*R. Yosi ha-Galili 'omer*" and continuing through *dayenu*;
- c. An alphabetical *piyyut* for the *asher ge'altanu* blessing.

Now, only (b) was kept in subsequent editions of the Haggadah text as far as we can tell from the manuscript evidence we possess. What does this mean? Does it mean that (b) was considered less *reshut* than the others? The other insertions all involve poetic versions of benedictions –these are not included. *Dayenu*, conceivably, was accepted because it did not involve a *berakhah*. The fact of the matter is that later on, during the Medieval period, it became part of the statutory Haggadah text.

Rahatz

According to Amram,⁵³ immediately after drinking the second cup one should wash the hands and say the blessing. This seems to be the expected consequence of the discussions on *netilat yadayim* referred to earlier when I dealt with the *rachatz* rubric. The source for this ruling can be found in the Mordechai commentary to Bavli Pesahim⁵⁴ but with a different wording. Saadiah follows Amram concerning this practice.⁵⁵

Motzi-matzah

The next three rubrics could be considered a unit regarding the halachic issue that they raise; however, I shall treat them as discrete sections for the sake of a sense of the literary structure I set myself to follow. The

eating of unleavened bread and of bitter herbs dates back to the biblical celebration of the eve of Pesah; these are the only remains of that era when the paschal sacrifice was eaten by the Israelites.

Eating *matzah* on the first night of Pesah is one of the defining positive commandments of the celebration since biblical times. Mishnah Pesahim 10:3 (quoted in Tosefta 10:9-10) presents *matzah* as one of the two primary elements to be eaten with the Passover sacrifice. Commenting on this passage Bokser suggests that, since the three elements are presented together, the implication is that after the destruction of the Temple, *matzah* and *maror* do not depend on the sacrifice to be considered *hovah*.⁵⁶ In this same spirit of equating the three elements of the sacrificial meal, Mishnah Pesahim 10:5 records the opinion of Rabban Gamaliel, “*matzah* is eaten because our fathers were redeemed from Egypt.” This is the basic rabbinic text for all the subsequent statements that *matzah* is a symbol of redemption. This text marks a turning point in the history of the Seder as well, as Bokser describes it:

By asserting that there is a cognitive meaning behind the rituals, their physical performance appears secondary, for when one becomes aware of their purpose, do not the rituals ipso facto achieve their desired message? The specific symbolic explanations

further attest to the new message. The unleavened bread, rather than the sacrifice, symbolizes redemption⁵⁷

It is to the character and nature of this cognitive meaning that the intellectual endeavor of subsequent generations of interpreters of rabbinic literature will devote much attention.

However, not all ritualistic concerns will be totally abandoned, as attested by Bavli Pesahim 115a which contains the basic ruling regarding the procedure for eating *matzah* and *maror* which is observed nowadays:

Now that the law was not stated either as Hillel or as the Rabbis, one recites the blessing 'al 'achilat *matzah* and eats; then one recite 'al 'achilat *maror* and eats; and then one eats unleavened bread and lettuce together without the blessing, in the memory of the Temple as Hillel did.

Notice that nowhere is the *ha-motzi* blessing mentioned or any specific number of *matzot*. As Goldschmidt has pointed out,⁵⁸ the omission of *ha-motzi* might be due to the fact that in rabbinic culture it was obvious that every time one was about to eat bread one should say the corresponding blessing (as the *baraita* in Bavli Berakhot 35a states it: "no one ever should enjoy it [bread] without a blessing"). As to the number of *matzot*, this became a disputed issue throughout halachic literature. An attempt

to provide a definite number of *matzot* is found elsewhere in the Babylonian Talmud:

R. Papa taught: everyone acknowledges regarding the issue of Pesah that one should place a piece of *matzah* [namely, a *prusah*] inside a whole loaf. What's its meaning? [It symbolizes] the bread of affliction.⁵⁹

Here it would seem that we need actually to eat one *matzah* and a half to fulfill the commandment, though it is not absolutely clear, for how do you put a piece *betokh* a whole *matzah* unless you are really using two whole loaves and a piece? The interpreters are divided on the interpretation of this passage.

A good example of the complexity of this issue can be illustrated by the question that, in the second half of the tenth century, the Jews of Kairouan sent to Sherirah, Gaon of Pumbedita. They asked him: "Why does one have to use three *matzot* for the night of Pesah, no more and no less?"

Sherirah's responsum⁶⁰ provides a homeletical as well as a symbolic interpretation of the *matzot*. The first interpretation he cites connects the number of *matzot* with the episode referred in Gen. 18:6 where Abraham asks Sarah to take three measures of flour, and to bake

‘ugot for the three illustrious visitors. The rabbinic understanding is that it was Pesah when the messengers visited Abraham and Sarah and announced to them that Isaac was going to be born.⁶¹ A second interpretation that he provided is that each *matzah* stands for each of the *harare ha-’olam* (lit. “mountains of the world,” fig. “eminent people”) which is a common phrase in rabbinic literature referring to the patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.⁶² He gave yet another reason. They correspond to:

three dippings in the blood of the hyssops that occurred in Egypt⁶³ concerning the homeborn slaves (*yelude bait*), concerning the [one] bought [from an outsider]⁶⁴ with money (*kinyan kesef*) and one with reference to the blood of the covenant (i.e. circumcision) and one with reference to the blood of [the sacrifice for] Pesah as it is written, (Ez. 16:6) [“When I passed by you] and saw you wallowing in your blood, I said to you: ‘Live because of your blood(s)’.⁶⁵

Apparently, according to this text there seem to be more than three *matzot*, at the time of *ha-motzi*, i. e., four. Lewin’s solution is to assume that there is a copyist’s mistake involved.⁶⁶ He emends the text to read as follows: “two dippings (*tevilot*) in reference to the two dippings (*tevilim*) that they did in Egypt, and some say one in reference to the blood of the covenant [of the circumcision].” Lewin’s emendation is based on the

assumption that there must some kind of parallelism in the gaon's interpretation, i. e., that we are actually in the presence of two explanations each of which accounts for the use of two *matzot*. That the number of *matzot* needed for this rubric is two and not three, becomes obvious when Sherirah feels the necessity to explain why there is still a third whole *matzah* on the table⁶⁷ which is related to the blessing after the meal as explained below.

Sherirah's responsum also contains other interpretations of the *matzot* in connection with some of the ritual action one is supposed to perform on the night of the Seder. His practice is to split one of the *matzot* in two parts as a remembrance of God's splitting both the Sea of Reeds and the Jordan river for the Israelites. And once one has half of a *matzah*, i. e., a *perusah* "a piece", one should pronounce the blessing over the *prusah*, and not over the whole one.

Now this raises a question, which Sherirah immediately answers: Why, since Pesah is a major holiday, does one use only half a *matzah* for the *ha-motzi* benediction? His answer is that *matzah* is *lechem oni*, the bread of affliction. Still, the Torah explicitly says that one needs *lechem mishneh* for Shabbat, and by means of a *gezerah shavah*, this prescription was extended as well a to *yom tov*. Now Sherirah has a tension: on the one hand the Talmud in Bavli Pesahim 115b mentions

that *lehem oni* is because “just as a beggar generally has (only) a piece (of bread), so too a piece is taken” (notice that it does *not* say that one should take three *matzot*); on the other hand, since Pesah definitely falls into the category of *yom tov* it requires a double portion.⁶⁸ Hence, his compromise is to have three *matzot*. First, one splits one of the *matzot* symbolizing the *lehem oni*, then a *perusah* of that broken *matzah* is placed between the other two whole *matzot* (in this manner fulfilling the commandment of having *lehem mishneh* for the holiday), then one pronounces the blessing over the two *matzot* and a half, but eat only from one of the *shelemot*. Still Sherirah has one more little problem: so far one has ritually used two of the *matzot*, but what about the third one? Well, that one, he suggests, should be used for doing the *korekh*.

Sherirah is following Amram’s ruling regarding this matter. According to Amram, after washing the hands one should:

take two loaves and a piece and put [the piece] in between the two whole loaves, and then break a piece from the two loaves and recite the blessing *ha-motzi* before doing so, but one should not eat. Then one should take the piece [of *matzah*, i. e., the *perusah*] which is in between the whole loaves, and break [it]⁶⁹

Therefore one needs two *matzot* and a piece. Amram himself follows the practice of one of his predecessors in the geonate of Surah, Moses (gaon

between 828 and 836), who taught that one should say the blessing *hamotzi* and break the *matzah*, but not eat it, and then pronounce the blessing *le'ekhol matzah* (note the difference from today's wording). Their solution to the problem of harmonizing *lechem oni* and *lehem mishneh* is to say the first blessing holding at least two whole loaves (*lehem mishneh*), and the second over a diminished portion (*lehem oni*).

Now, to make things more complicated, and to show that by no means was the matter decided in geonic times I will turn to Saadiah's account of the Seder ritual. Saadiah prescribes one loaf and a half on weekdays,⁷⁰ and only when the eve of Passover happens to be on Friday evening, because of Shabbat should one take two loaves and a half. Saadiah's interpretation reflects in fact the opinion of R. Natronai (who lived a century earlier).⁷¹ Both of them seem to follow a very close reading of the text of Bavli Berakhot 39b. In the opinion of R. Abba, on Shabbat one should pronounce the blessing over two loaves. Saadiah assumes that Abba's ruling applies specifically to the Shabbat which happens to be *yom tov* as well. However, there is no indication, other than the juxtaposition of the two opinions, for such an assumption (notice that Abba's opinion is also cited in Bavli Shabbat 117b in relation to Shabbat).

Maror

Maror has an equal symbolic status to *matzah* in the history of the Seder. The bitter herbs are mentioned in conjunction with *matzah* in Mishnah Pesahim 10:3 (and Tosefta Pisha 10:9-10) where they are equated with the Passover sacrifice, in an effort of reinterpret and supplement the earlier heritage.⁷² Thus, what I mentioned earlier regarding the cognitive meaning added to *matzah* is also valid for *maror*.

The Babylonian Talmud in Pesahim 39a contains an extensive discussion of the kinds of herbs with which one discharges the obligation of eating *maror* on Passover according to the commandment prescribed in Ex. 12:8, "they shall eat the flesh [of the Passover sacrifice] that same night ... with bitter herbs." R. Oshaya teaches that the obligation is properly [fulfilled with] *hazeret*; the implication being that this kind of fresh vegetable is preferred over all others. The *gemara* continues: "And Raba said: What is *hazeret*? *Hassa*. What does *hassa* [symbolize]? That the Merciful One had pity [*has*] upon us." Notice that this is the first time in the discussion that a "meaning" other than synonyms is brought into the *sugyah*. In this same spirit, the opinion of R. Sh'muel b. Nachmani is brought into consideration, "Why were the Egyptians compared to *maror*? To teach you: just as this *maror*, the beginning of which is soft while its end is hard [the top is soft while the stalk hardens like wood], so were

the Egyptians: their beginning was soft [mild], but their end was hard [cruel]!" The interpretation which tried to provide a symbolic meaning for the *maror* will have a perdurable effect in subsequent generations who attempt to identify the *maror* with their bitter existence of *galut*. Not only will the search for meaning in *maror* continue, but also the investigation as to which vegetables are to be called *maror* in the different geographical landscapes where the Jews will find themselves.

Maybe it is because of the specific agricultural conditions of North Africa that the Jews of Kairouan asked R. Sherirah (gaon of Pumbedita 968-998) this straightforward question: "Concerning *maror*, what happens if one has only one kind of fresh vegetable?" This question should be understood in the context of the Seder where another fresh vegetable is needed for the *karpas* rubric as I discussed earlier. Sherirah's response was very straightforward as well. He answered them with a text from Bavli Pesahim 115a. Sherirah wrote, "One should recite the blessings *bore peri ha-'adamah* and *al 'akhilat maror*, and when he reaches *maror* (i.e. the rubric) one eats that same vegetable without pronouncing the blessing." The idea is not to duplicate the blessings but at the same time fulfill the commandment of eating *maror*. So the Halachah, which follows R. Hisda's opinion in the talmudic passage I've just alluded to, is to say two blessings at the time of *karpas*: *bore peri ha-'adamah* and *'al 'akhilat maror*, in the case that one uses one kind of

fresh vegetable for both rubrics. In this way, the only thing left for the *maror* rubric is eating it at the traditionally prescribed time.

Amram, in his siddur, provides a detailed list of the fresh vegetables fit for *maror*, directly taken from Bavli Pesahim 39a. He doesn't mention all the options given in that folio, but only a selection. It is hard to tell if by mentioning Mishnah Pesahim 2:6, R. Oshayah, and Raba, he is referring to the entire discussion on folio 39a or strictly to what he actually quotes. In other words, are these *rashei perakim* that he mentions, as if he were sending his reader to read the respective talmudic discussions, or is he giving a value judgment on the importance of those opinions he quotes? In any case, it's important to notice that on the one hand, he quotes an example of talmudic text which attempts to provide a definition of *maror*, and on the other, an example of symbolic interpretation of *maror*, as if he were saying that both aspects are to be taken into consideration.

Korekh

The source for this rubric can found in Bavli Pesahim 115a.³ The Talmudic discussion seems to indicate that the divergent opinions of Hillel and the Rabbis concerning eating *matzah* and *maror* together was

resolved by prescribing that one should proceed as we do it in today's Seder. In a responsum written by Sherirah Ga'on as to why one should use three *matzot* on the Seder night, we find this very same conclusion to the discussion: "One should break yet another *matzah* in order to eat bitter herbs with it so that one can fulfill [the commandment] "you shall eat it [i.e. the Passover sacrifice] over [along with] unleavened bread and bitter herbs."⁷³ Why shouldn't one pronounce a blessing over it? Because it is only in remembrance of the Temple [*zekher le-mikdash*]."⁷⁴

Shulhan 'orekh

This rubric has no text associated with it. The Mishnah (Pesahim 10:7) assumes that the meal is eaten right from the start –the child's questions respond to the peculiar custom of the meal that is then being (unlike the present custom). Likewise, the Talmud and the *geonim* take for granted that there is a meal. Both Amram⁷⁵ and Saadiah⁷⁶ placed the meal section in the same order of today's Seder, i. e., right after the blessing over *matzah* and *maror*, and the Hillel sandwich.

Mishnah Pesahim 10:3 mentions the use of two cooked dishes (*shene tavshilin*) together with unleavened bread, bitter herbs and *charoset* to be eaten during the course of the Seder. The Babylonian

Talmud (Pesahim 114b) as well as the Yerushalmi (Pesahim 10:3) identify these two dishes with different kinds of food, but gave no explanation as to what their symbolic meaning is –later they will be identified with the two offerings of Pesah eaten in the Temple: the *korban pesah* and the *hagigah*.

On reference to these two cooked dishes, the Jews of Kairouan asked Sherirah about their meaning. This is what he answered them:

[We eat them] in memory of the two emissaries, Moses and Aaron whom the Holy One sent to Egypt, and there are some who add a third dish in memory of Miriam, as it is written (Mica 6:4) “and I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam,” and these three cooked dishes are fish, meat, and an egg corresponding to the kinds of food that Israel will eat in the world to come, fish corresponds to the Leviathan, meat corresponds to the creatures of the field (*ziz sadai*, Psalms 50:11, 80:14), and the egg corresponds to the wild ox (*shor ha-bar*, Hullin 80a).⁷⁷

Sherirah seems to identify each of the dishes with a symbolic element in the future redemption, introducing again the idea that Passover is the prototype for redemption. The Midrash refers to the future redemption as a time when the Jewish people will eat the Leviathan and the creatures of the field for a thousand years.⁷⁸ This food seems to be the standard

mythical food of the world to come, as it is evident from the Midrashic reading of Job 2:26, as predicting an even greater reward than the Leviathan if the Jews would strictly observe the proper procedure when ritually slaughtering an animal.⁷⁹ These Midrashic sources don't contain a direct reference to the Passover meals, so one must assume that Sherirah knew of a source that made such connection or that he actually was the first in making it.

Tzafun

The source for the practice of eating a piece of *matzah* (specially saved for that purpose) at the end of the meal finds its basis in the tannaitic dictum: *ein maftirin*⁸⁰ *aḥar ha-pesaḥ afikoman* (Mishnah Pesahim 1:8 and Tosefta Pisha 10:11). Danby translates it as, "After the Passover meal they should not disperse to join in revelry."⁸¹ Even in ancient times the meaning of *afikoman* was not entirely clear. The above mentioned Tosefta text continues by explaining *afikoman*, "For example, nuts, dates, and parched corn." According to Bokser,

"The explanation in the Tosefta is ... incorrect. If, however, the Tosefta refers to types of delicacies served after a meal, especially to whet one's thirst, this comment, as well would reflect the

attempt to distinguish the Passover meal from symposium manners and revelry."⁸²

Scholars agree on the "original" meaning of *afikoman* as coming from Greek for *epi-komos*, used in reference to no carousing, revelry, crashing other symposia, but the rabbis in the Talmud disagreed on their understanding of it. Yerushalmi Pesahim 10:8 (in the Venice edition) contains several opinions on what *afikoman* is, similar to the ones contained in the Mishnah, that the *afikoman* is some sort of dessert. Bavli Pesahim 119b, on the other hand, contains the basic discussion for the traditional substitutive understanding of *afikoman* as the last food one should taste at the Seder in lieu of the paschal lamb.

In his liturgical responsum, Amram cited some key sentences from Bavli Pesahim 119b, but didn't elaborate much on the rubric.⁸³ As in the case of *maror* dealt with above, it is difficult to determine if Amram, by quoting the opinions of the *amoraim*, meant to refer the reader to the appropriate "folios" in the Talmud or not. Even though Amram cited divergent opinions, his own is that *afikoman* is a piece of unleavened bread, for which he gives no reason.

Saadia prescribes that after the meal "one should eat, as the dessert course of the banquet, a slice of unleavened bread,"⁸⁴ and in this way he combines, on the one hand, the fact that the *afikoman* was

supposed to be some sort of “dessert” course with, on the other hand, the “historical” reality that the Passover sacrifice at the Seder table is no longer available.

Barekh

According to Mishnah Pesahim 10:7, “After they have mixed for him the third cup he recites the grace after meals,” thus assigning the third cup of wine to this rubric.

R. Hanan in Bavli Pesahim 117b makes explicit what was assumed already in the Mishnah passage above, that is, “the grace after meals requires a cup [of wine],” thus assuring that this third cup is also *chovah*. I will deal with the issues raised by the prescription concerning four mandatory cups of wine in part two below.

According to Sherirah there is a third whole *matzah* exclusively dedicated for the time when one pronounces the grace after the meal.⁸⁵ Notice that neither the Mishnah nor the Talmud mentioned *matzah* in association with the *birkat ha-mazon*. His ruling is based on a Talmudic passage found in Bavli Sanhedrin 102a:

"Anyone who doesn't leave a loaf of bread over his table (presumably when one is reciting the *birkat ha-mazon*) does not see a sign of good augury."

In the case of the Seder, one should leave a whole *matzah* on the table in order to fulfill this rabbinic dictum. Sherirah goes further in his ruling when he compares the need for three pieces of unleavened bread with the four cups of wine, considering all other number of *matzot* as *tafel* (just as one is allowed to drink more than four cups of wine, if one so desires) and number three as an *'ikar* element. This connection between the four cups and the number of *matzot* seems to be a *hiddush* introduced by Sherirah (or at least by someone Sherirah read or knew of in the geonic period) and doesn't have any basis in the rabbinic sources. It might well have happened that, by the time of Sherirah, there was a custom of having three "mandatory" loaves of unleavened bread at the Seder table, and he was called upon to give the rationale for such a custom.

Goldschmidt mentions that the text for this rubric is not found in most of the Cairo genizah manuscripts.⁸⁶ From this evidence, one can conclude that the grace after the meal was recited by heart. The same geonic responsum, recorded by Amram, which deals with the "itinerant" *mekadesh* (mentioned earlier at the *kadesh* rubric) contains evidence that it was quite common that adult Jews, who might not have been

versed in the *kiddush* (and in other sections of the Haggadah) for the simple reason that these prayers are not recited as part of their daily routine, were knowledgeable regarding the *birkat ha-mazon*.⁸⁷ The absence of a text for the grace after meals in Amram's and Saadiah's respective versions of the ritual of the Seder doesn't mean that they didn't deal with the *birkat ha-mazon* elsewhere where they dealt with the grace after meals in general.⁸⁸ One can easily assume that such discussions could apply to the recitation of the grace after the meal at the *barekh* rubric.

Hallel

This rubric is, to some extent, a continuation of the *magid* section which concluded with the recitation of Psalms 113 and 114 (and the *ge'ulah blessing*). This section contains Psalm 115 to 118, completing the so-called "Egyptian Hallel."⁸⁹ This division in the recitation of the Hallel seems to be what Mishnah Pesahim 10:7 intended: "[Over a] fourth [cup] he completes the *hallel* and says after it the blessing over the song," although the meaning of *birkat ha-shir* is far from certain here. Bavli Pesahim 118a records a dispute between Rab Judah and R. Yoḥanan on the identification of *birkat ha-shir*. The former identified it with *yehalelukhah*, and the latter with *nishmat kol ḥai* (and the *halakhah*

follows R. Judah).⁹⁰ Immediately after these divergent opinions, there is a *baraita* which expresses R. Tarfon's opinion that at the fifth cup one should finish the Hallel, and recites the great Hallel. This fifth cup has been usually understood⁹¹ as symbolizing the "final" redemption expressed by the fifth utterance found in Ex. 6:7, "Then I shall bring you," related to the establishing of a sovereign Jewish state, the rebuilding of the Temple and the coming of the Messiah. Hence, those who had a fifth cup in their *sedarim* were at the same time making a theological statement. As Hoffman pointed out, ⁹² R. Tarfon's custom adds not only an extra cup of wine but also the recitation of *hallel ha-gadol*, which are presented as an inseparable unit. R. Judah identified the Great Hallel with Psalm 136, though there are other opinions (like those who prescribe Psalm 23). After giving account of the Talmud's uncertainty regarding what the *hallel ha-gadol* was, Hoffman concludes that, "The fifth cup and its own *hallel* remained the custom of isolated groups at best, never that of the majority."⁹³ Both Amram⁹⁴ and Saadiah⁹⁵ consider the fifth cup and its Hallel *reshut*, and other *geonim* such as Moses (828-836), Kohen Tzedek b. Abomai (838-848), and Sar Shalom (848-853) are of this opinion as well.⁹⁶

Since by the geonic period the fifth cup was either only a marginal or at least optional practice (or had fallen to total disuse), the *geonim* concentrated in the blessings that should accompany the *hallel*. For

Tzemaḥ b. Sh'lomoh and others⁹⁷ the reason not to recite the blessing *lignor* is because one divides the Hallel in half during the Seder. They cited for their support the text from Mishnah Pesahim 10:7, implying that if one has to conclude the *hallel* over the fourth cup it's only because one has begun its recitation some time earlier, i. e., during *magid* rubric.

The divergent opinion in this case is that of Hai (d. 1038), who opposed to its recitation. Hoffman explains that, "[his] real reason for not saying it [the blessing before the Hallel] is that the *Hallel* is said as a *shirah* and not *keriah*."⁹⁸ Moreover,

How he reasoned from its being a *shir* not a *keriah* to the conclusion that it should have no blessing is a matter of speculation. In all probability, the normal blessing in Amram's day was *lignor* and that is why Amram and Tzemaḥ stipulated not to say *lignor*⁹⁹

But two hundred years later, in the time of Hai the situation was different. The standard blessing became *likro et ha-hallel*¹⁰⁰, apparently through some kind of interpretation of Amram's ruling.¹⁰¹ Therefore, Hai could not outlaw the blessing for the same reasons as Amram did. His rationale was then, that since the Egyptian Hallel is the only authentic and possible *shir* that the Mishnah could have intended, one should not say the blessing before it. But he did this in the context of his opposition

to the *hallel ha-gadol*, concluding that this hallel and its corresponding cup of wine should be avoided at all cost.

Nirtzah

This rubric was not incorporated into the Seder until after the 11th century,¹⁰² thus the *geonim* had no commentary on it.

Part II: Miscellaneous Elements

'Arba kosot

The four cups during the Seder constitute an element that pervades the different rubrics, and should be considered separately. While two of the cups are part of other traditional festive meals such as Shabbat, i.e., the cup of *Kadesh* and the cup of *barekh*, the other two, the one associated with the recitation of the *magid* section, and the one linked with the conclusion of the Hallel are both unique to the Seder's ritual. The tannaitic authorities established that both rich and poor male Jews should drink the four cups;¹⁰³ the Talmud added that women, men and children alike should partake in the four cups of wine.¹⁰⁴ It is an obligation so highly regarded that even in cases when wine could be pernicious for the health of the individual, it shouldn't be overlooked.¹⁰⁵ Such is the degree of obligation involved in the fulfillment of this *mitzvah* that R. Natronai and other *geonim*, given that this *mitzvah* is a rabbinic injunction, prescribed lashes for whomever dared not to follow their ruling.¹⁰⁶

As far as the mechanics of each cup are concerned, Hoffman affirms that:

The blessing preceding each of the four cups was [...] an issue ... Ibn Giat [Isaac ben Judah Ibn Ghayyat, Spain, 1038-1089] quotes [in his *Halakhot Ketullot* -a.k.a. *Sha'are Simḥah*] Amram, Natronai and Kohen Tzedek in demanding a separate blessing for each cup. Kohen Tzedek is also quoted in *Geonica*, where additional information is given. We are told there that both *yeshivot* say the blessing before each cup.¹⁰⁷

There is no doubt that by the geonic period, the practice of reciting one and the same blessing before each cup¹⁰⁸ was well established in Babylonia.

According to the discussion recorded in Bavli Pesahim 108b, each cup should contain at least one fourth of a log (0.137 liter).¹⁰⁹ However, one doesn't have to drink it all, but most of it. Apparently, the *geonim* didn't dispute this regulation.¹¹⁰ As to the quality of the wine, I have already discussed the issue in geonic literature earlier at the *kadesh* rubric. It is worth noting here, still, that R. Natronai seems to place special importance on the kind of wine used for the fourth cup. For the cup that corresponds to the *magid*, for instance, one could use a mix of water and honey, or any other "important beverage" (*shekhar medina*) of

the locals; however, for the cup of Hallel one should strive to obtain and use raisin-wine, just as it was pointed out in the case of *kiddush*.

In Yerushalmi Pesahim 10:1 (and also in Midrash Bereshit Rabbah section 88:3 with some textual variations)¹¹¹ several reasons were given to why the rabbis prescribed the four cups, and they can be summarized as follows:¹¹²

1. They correspond to the four utterances which mean “redemption” in Ex. 6:6-7: “I will take you out (*ve-hotzeti*) from the labors of the Egyptians and deliver (*ve-hitzalti*) you from their bondage. I will redeem (*ve-ga’alti*) you with an outstretched arm and through extraordinary chastisements. And I will take (*ve-lakalti*) you to be My people, and I will be your God [...]” which were said in regard to the redemption from Egypt. Thus, the amoraic authorities understood these four utterances as synonyms.
2. They correspond to the four times that the word “cup” is mentioned in the interpretation of the dream of the cupbearer in Gen. 40: 11, 13, and 14. “The four cups in the dream and its interpretation brought or preceded a redemption, in this instance that of Joseph.”¹¹³ It is as if Joseph’s personal story in Egypt served as a prototype for his descendants (the difference is that Joseph is “redeemed” from prison,

to go and work for Pharaoh, which in the context of the Seder sounds more like an irony than an event to emulate).

3. They correspond to the four nations of the world that oppressed the Jews: Babylonia, Media, Greece, and Rome. Consequently, each cup thus stands for each of the times when Israel was released from them.
4. They correspond to the four cups of retribution (*pur'anut*) that God will give to drink to the nations of the world that oppressed the Jews: Babylonia, Media, Greece, and Rome,¹¹⁴ the implication being that each of the cups of the Seder counts as a cup of consolation (*neḥamah*) for the Jews, and symbolizes, therefore, freedom.

Sherirah, in a responsum to the Jews of Kairouan (and Nissim b. Jacob "gaon," d. 1062) quoted these four explanations as valid interpretations for the four cups,¹¹⁵ although he had a slightly different text which made explicit the implications of reason No. 4:

They correspond to the four cups of redemption God gives Israel to drink [quoting the same verses as the *Yerushalmi*, cf. note 106], and "redemptions" only means one redemption [brought about by the] coming of the Messiah and in the world to come. From here [we learn from the words of Sar Shalom gaon of Sura]¹¹⁶ that the

four cups are mandatory (*hovah*) but the fifth cup is optional (*reshut*).

Now, theoretically, all these explanations could not be held to be affirmed at the same time. What I mean by this is: Suppose that in fact the four cups correspond to the four utterances in Exodus chapter 6, then, we are missing at least one cup (if not two, i. e., *ve-heveti* and *ve-natati*). On the other hand, if each cup stands for “redemption” in general, as explanation No. 4 seems to imply, then, there shouldn’t be any opposition to the fifth cup on the ground of homiletics. One way (i.e., accepting reason No. 1) or the other (i.e., accepting reason No. 4) a fifth cup at the Seder should have been the accepted practice. But there was great opposition to this practice (maybe because of historical reasons) among the *geonim*, as I showed earlier in the discussion of the *hallel*, and the practice was discouraged. Sherirah quotes, at the end of his responsum on this matter the opinion of some who accepted reason No. 1 for the four cups and reason No. 4 for the fifth cup. For those who held this position, the fifth cup was ruled out,¹¹⁷ but the different aspects of redemption as an explanation for the four cups (which was to become the most wide spread interpretation throughout later commentaries of the Seder ritual) was saved. The bottom line is that all these are homeletical explanations after the fact, and not the actual reasons for the practice in

question; however, even on the rhetorical level, the argument seems, to me, unconvincing.

Haroset

The Mishnah registered a dispute as to the obligatory nature of *haroset*. In Pesahim 10:3, the *stam* Mishnah's opinion is that it is not a *mitzvah* to have *haroset* at the Seder table. On the other hand, "R. Eliezer b. R. Tzadok says: It is a *mitzvah*."

The Babylonian Talmud in folio 116a examine both possibilities.

Then if it is not a religious requirement, on what account does one bring it? Said R. Ammi: On account of the *kappa*.

This explanation becomes clear in reference to what R. Papa mentioned at the very beginning of Pesahim 115a: "To counteract the *kappa*," the *kappa* being somewhat of a poisonous substance contained in the *hazeret*. This reason relates the *haroset* to the Seder only in an indirect way, via the bitter herbs on a rather dubious botanical basis. After all, aren't the bitter herbs supposed to be "bitter," why would anyone want to take that main characteristic away from them? Besides, there is no

evidence which indicates that people used to die during the Seder because of the *maror*.

If one takes the other way of reasoning, and accepts it is a *mitzvah*, then what would be its symbolic rationale?

R. Levi said: In memory of the clay [with which the Israelites made bricks in Egypt]. Abaye observed: Therefore one must make it acrid and thicken it, in memory of the clay.

In this way, the Talmud connected the *ḥaroseṭ* with the narrative of the Seder, and gave it a symbolic meaning, like those *matzah* and *maror*. However, the problem is that nowhere in the Torah is *ḥaroseṭ* mentioned. Not even the word the Talmud uses for clay, "*ṭit*," is ever mentioned in the Exodus narrative, or anywhere else in connection with the slavery in Egypt. The fact of the matter is that the linguistic origin of the word *ḥaroseṭ* remains unknown;¹¹⁸ nevertheless, the Talmudic authorities tried to make sense of it anyway.

There is yet another source which supports the *mitzvah* status of *ḥaroseṭ*. It is found both in the Tosefta (Pisha 10:10) and in the Talmud Yerushalmi: "Merchants of Jerusalem (Tosefta: Lud) used to say, "Come and take (Tosefta: buy) the spices of the commandment" (Yerushalmi Pesaḥim 10:3). The language attributed to the venders indicates that

people believed that the *haroset*, which contained spices, was prescribed by law. This case seems to support R. Eliezer b. Tzadok's position.¹¹⁹

Yerushalmi Pesahim 10:3 echoes the reasons of the Bavli given in the name of R. Levi, and gives an additional symbolic explanation: "There are those who teach, 'It is required to be murky.' This implies [that the *haroset*] is a remembrance of the blood [of redemption]," connecting, therefore, the *haroset* with the powerful mythical symbolism of blood.

The closest one gets to a recipe for *haroset* in geonic literature is Saadiah's description of a dressing, which he calls *helek*. One is prescribed to consume it during the Seder; it contains dates, nuts, and garlic, mixed together with vinegar.¹²⁰ Amram mentions *haroset* in connection with the eating of the *maror* (see supra relevant rubric) but provides no recipe. The reason for the lack of information in the geonic sources regarding the specifics of *haroset* might be due to its unclear status in the tannaitic and amoraic texts. Thus, the recipes of *haroset*, unlike that of *matzah*, differ greatly according to the geographical and ethnic affiliation of the different Jewish communities.

Conclusion

By this time, it should be clear how varied and fragmented the geonic sources are. Nevertheless, since this is the time for drawing some conclusions, I will consider all the *geonim* as a group and attempt to evaluate their contribution to the continuing halachic "dialogue."

From their harsh language and their stress on what constitutes proper *nusah* and what not, it becomes evident that the *geonim* made an effort to fix the liturgy according to the practice of the two talmudic academies of Babylon, and paid no attention to other practices unless they felt the need to suppress them. So, when their contemporaries turned to them for interpretations, clarification, and guidance in halachic matters, they were given authoritative rulings about what was acceptable and what should be dismissed as "heresy."

As I have shown, Amram and Saadiah left very tangible proofs of their attempts at setting the standards for Jewish practice everywhere; they felt compelled to lead the Jews back from their "deviant" ways into "mainstream" practice. Their *siddurim* (Amram's being in fact a responsum) include important information about the Haggadah. Their respective versions of the Haggadah give us a clear idea of what parts of

the text that we have today in the traditional Haggadah were already canonized by the ninth century, and what parts constitute later additions. Moreover, the polemical character of their works, as well as surviving texts of other *geonim*, indicates that some of the texts that they present as accepted parts of the Haggadah, were actually being questioned by Palestinian authorities and those who followed their ruling. Otherwise, why did they spend so much time in trying to suppress them? So, their responsa are both a source for their own practice and for the practice of their contemporaries elsewhere in the Jewish world.

However, their *siddurim* are not merely a source of information regarding the understanding of the Haggadah commonly accepted among scholars in the ninth and tenth century, but also a source of authority for later generations of halachic scholars. As has become clear throughout this work, most of the *geonic* sources available to us today have been either corrupted in the process of transmission from generation to generation—as in the case of *Seder Amram* which needed a great deal of critical edition in order to distinguish which parts could be safely be attributed to the *geonim* and which are clearly later additions—or quoted in rishonic literature. This is not so much a problem with *Siddur Saadia*, which was not copied as much or used as much—it was lost to us for centuries, but the Genizah manuscripts of it are reliable. In

any case, it is as if post-geonic authorities have treated geonic literature in the same way that the *geonim* had treated the Babylonian Talmud, i.e., as a source of authority for their own ruling. In other words, geonic literature became the patrimony of later halachic authorities, and fully entered the ongoing discourse of Jewish law to the extent that they became practically "indistinguishable" from sources which preceded them; they became another layer on top of the Babylonian Talmud, which had to be read, after the *geonim*, together with their understanding. Consequently, anyone commenting upon the Haggadah after the *geonim* incorporated their interpretation as an integral part of the text. What I have tried to achieve in this work was to isolate, as much as possible, the commentary of the *geonim* from that of later authorities in order to reconstruct the stage at which the Haggadah was in their time, trying not to pay attention to how later authorities read geonic sources, but rather concentrating on how the *geonim* read the Babylonian Talmud, and by their reading, answered the various *she'elot*.

In general, one can see that the *geonim* drew deeply from the talmudic sources –almost exclusively from the Bavli, obviously *their* Talmud. Whether regarding the versions for the text of the *kiddush*, the number of *matzot*, or the appropriateness of the fifth cup, they made sure that the practice of the two *yeshivot* had a basis in the Babylonian Talmud. In all the cases that I have discussed, it was evident that the

geonim had no regard for what they consider foreign *minhagim*, i.e., anything that was not *their* practice.

Very few are the geonic sources which refer to homiletical interpretations of the text of the Haggadah. When I started the research for this work, I had hoped to find lots of non-halachic interpretations of the Haggadah, but all I found were a few pearls. I would suggest that such interpretations circulated in Sura and Pumbedita in the time of the *geonim*, simply because symbolic interpretations are integral parts of religious experience. The fact of the matter is that very few homiletical interpretations –like the one on the meaning of the four cups of wine-- which advanced symbolic understanding of the Haggadah mostly based on *midrashim* have survived.

I think that the geonic sources which did survive are an inevitable stop for anyone who really wants to understand how the Haggadah and the Seder came to be what they are today. This stop should not be seen as a mere transitional period (which any historical period can be) that bridges the gap between the Talmud and the great medieval authorities, but as the decisive period in the evolution towards a unified text of the Haggadah, and towards a standardized ritual of the Seder. Probably against their own will, the *geonim* did not have the last word on the Haggadah. Proof of the unfinished task that the *geonim* left for future

generations can be found in the fact that later authorities went back, once again, to the geonic sources in search for recognized authoritative antecedents for their own ruling. Proof of that is also our recurring visitation of the geonic sources in search for new "old" meanings and interpretations of the Haggadah, those upheld as well as those systematically suppressed by the *geonim*, with the hope that they will help us and guide us in a journey towards a enlightened, deeper and more spiritual understanding of that night of our religious year which is different from all other nights: the night of the Seder.

NOTES

¹ Lawrence Hoffman, "Liturgical Responses Suppressed by the Geonim in Their Attempt to Fix the Liturgy," diss., Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, 1973, and Lawrence Hoffman, "The Passover Haggadah" in *The Canonization of the Synagogue Service* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1979).

² See Daniel Goldschmidt, *Haggadah shel Pesah ve-toldoteha* (Jerusalem: The Bialik Institute, 1960), p. 73 ff., for a detailed description of the oldest manuscripts available at the time of Goldschmidt's work.

³ See Menachem Kasher, ed., *Haggadah shelema*, (Jerusalem: Torah Shelema Institute, 1967), Introduction pp. 77-82, for a discussion of the different versions of the rubrics of the Seder.

⁴ S. Stein, "Symposia Literature and the Pesah Haggadah," *The Journal of Jewish Studies* 8 (1957): pp. 13-44.

⁵ Stein, p. 17.

⁶ Charles Burton Gulick, ed. and trans., *Athenaeus: The Deipnosophists* (London & New York: Heinemann & Putman's Sons, 1927), p. 157.

⁷ Gulick, *Athenaeus: The Deipnosophists* II, 36, for a detailed discussion of the meaning and numbers of cups appropriate for a symposium according to classical Greek authors who were Atheneaus sources on the matter.

⁸ Baruch Bokser, *The Origins of the Seder: The Passover Rite and Early Rabbinic Judaism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p. 63.

⁹ Mishnah Berakhot 8:1.

¹⁰ Tosefta Pisha 10:1.

¹¹ Bavli Pesahim 109a.

¹² Baruch Bokser, and Lawrence Schiffman, H. trans. and ed., *The Talmud of the Land of Israel: Tractate Pesahim* (Chicago: University of University Press, 1994), p. 476 No. V.

¹³ Benjamin Lewin, ed., *'Otzar Ha-ge'onim: Teshuvot ge'one bavel u-ferushehem al pi Seder ha-talmud: Pesahim* (Jerusalem, The Hebrew University, 1931), p. 91, No. 221.

¹⁴ Lewin, *Otzar*, p. note 10, and Hildesheimer, Ezriel, ed., *Sefer Halakhot Gedolot helek rishon* (Jerusalem: Mekitze nirdamim, 1971), p. 291.

¹⁵ Hoffman, "Liturgical."

¹⁶ Lewin, *Otzar*, p. 90, No. 221.

¹⁷ Lewin, *Otzar*, p. 90, No. 221.

¹⁸ A version of this "alternative" *kiddush* could be found in the fragments of a genizah Haggadah published in Daniel Goldschmidt, *Haggadah shel Pesah mekoroteha ve-toldoteha...* (Jerusalem: The Bialik Institute, 1960), p. 75.

¹⁹ Simcha Assaf, Israel Davidson, and Joel Issachar, ed., *Siddur Rav Saadiah Ga'on* (Jerusalem: Mekitze Nirdamim, 1941), p. 141, No. 106a-b.

²⁰ Ezriel Hildesheimer, ed., *Halachot Gedolot* (Jerusalem: Mekitze Nirdamim, 1971), p. 296.

²¹ Daniel Goldschmidt, *Seder Rav Amram*, (Jerusalem: The Rav Kook Institute, 1971), No. 85.

²² Menachem Kasher, ed., *Haggadah shelema*, (Jerusalem: Torah Shelema Institute, 1967), "Introduction," p. 96.

²³ Cited by Yosef Tabory, *Pesah dorot* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz hameuchad, 1996), p. 212.

²⁴ Bavli Pesahim 115b.

²⁵ Daniel Goldschmidt, ed., *Seder Rav Amram Ga'on* (Jerusalem: The Rav Kook Institute, 1971), p. 112.

²⁶ According to Goldschmidt, *Haggadah*, p. 7, n. 14, "The custom of not reciting the blessing *al netilat yadayim* (before eating *karpas*) is based on what the Maharam of Rotenburg wrote: "Nowadays it is not necessary to recite the blessing over some food that one dips during the course of a banquet" and therefore he did not say the blessing. This ruling was

accepted by Joseph Caro in his *Bet Yosef* and in the *Shulhan 'Arukh*, and all the different 'edot followed him.

²⁷ Assaf, et al., *Seder Rav Saadiah*, p. 136, note 15.

²⁸ Bokser and Schiffman, *The Talmud*, p. 488.

²⁹ Tosefta Pisha 10:5.

³⁰ Goldschmidt, *Seder Rav Amram*, p. 112, and Assaf et al., *Seder Rav Saadiah*, p. 136.

³¹ Marcus Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature*, (New York, Judaica, 1903).

³² Notice that the wording used by Amram is *le'echol maror* and not '*al 'achilat maror* as it is in the text we know nowadays (cf. Goldschmidt, *Seder Rav Amram*, p. 112, line 20).

³³ Lewin, *Otzar*, p. 122, No. 337, and Goldschmidt, *Seder Rav Amram*, p. 113.

³⁴ Goldschmidt, *Haggadah*, p. 9.

³⁵ Hoffman, "Liturgical Responses," p. 281.

³⁶ Lewin, *Otzar*, p. 112.

³⁷ Lewin, *Otzar*, p. 112, No. 303, quoted from Eliezer b. Judah of Worms, *Ma'aseh rokeach*, p. 19, No. 70.

³⁸ Menachem Sanok, *Sefer Ma'aseh Rokeah* (Dukla: Haim Hirschprung, 1912), p. 19, No. 70.

³⁹ Lewin, *Otzar*, p. 112, No. 303, quoted from Isaac Ben Moshe of Vienna's '*Or zaru'a* (first complete printed edition 1862).

⁴⁰ See also H. S. Horovitz and I. A. Rabin, ed., *Mekhilta derabbi Yismael*, (Jerusalem: Wahrman, 1971), *Masekhet de-Pisha*, Bo, Section 18, pp. 73-74.

⁴¹ Bokser and Schiffman, *The Talmud*, p. 495.

⁴² For a detailed discussion of the different versions of the dispute between Rav and Sh'muel on *ma'i genut* see Kasher, *Haggadah shelemah*,

Introduction, pp. 23-26, who traces the manuscripts variations, as well as the discussions and interpretations of this Talmudic passage among the *rishonim*.

⁴³ See also Bokser and Schiffman, B. *The Talmud of the Land of Israel*, p. 496, who follow the reading of the Leiden manuscript, which differs manuscripts from that of the traditional Vilna edition of the *Yerushalmi*.

⁴⁴ Lewin, *Otzar*, p. 89, No. 220, and Goldschmidt, *Haggadah*, pp. 19 and 73.

⁴⁵ Hoffman, *The Canonization*, p. 17, and Goldschmidt, *Haggadah*, p. 74.

⁴⁶ Goldschmidt, *Haggadah*, p. 19.

⁴⁷ Pesahim 115b.

⁴⁸ Goldschmidt, *Haggadah*, p. 17. It is worth noting that this text does occur in Goldschmidt's critical edition of *Seder Rav Amram* (p. 114, line 20 ff.) but since this passage is not found in Saadiah's *siddur*, one must assume, following Goldschmidt, that it is indeed a later insertion in Amram's work at a time when this passage was already part of the traditionally received text of the Haggadah.

⁴⁹ We know very little about how the *geonim* interpreted the text of the Torah, and about which Midrashic standardized interpretations they accepted. On page 34 of his *Haggadah* Goldschmidt traces the history of the two interpretations, which is probably an ancient one, about the identity of the "wanderer Aramean." In order to get an idea of how the geonic authorities understood this text of the Haggadah one has to turn to what is left from that period. In Saadiah's commentary to Deut. 26:5 we find his interpretation: "Laban the Aramean almost destroyed my father [i. e. Jacob]." However, there is no such commentary by other *geonim*, and I am not sure that Saadiah would have interpreted in this same way the occurrence of this text in the Haggadah, (or even if his commentary to the verse in Deuteronomy -also recorded in *Sifre Deuteronomy* ad loci-- is at all relevant for a commentary of the Haggadah).

⁵⁰ Goldschmidt, *Haggadah*, p. 50.

⁵¹ Assaf, et al., *Siddur Saadiah*, p. 143.

⁵² Goldschmidt, *Haggadah*, p. 47.

⁵³ Goldschmidt, *Seder Rav Amram*, p. 116.

⁵⁴ Goldschmidt, *Seder Rav Amram*, p. 116, note to line 118.

⁵⁵ Assaf, et al., *Siddur Saadia*, p. 145.

⁵⁶ Bokser, *The Origins*, p. 39.

⁵⁷ Bokser, *The Origins*, p. 79.

⁵⁸ Goldschmidt, *Haggadah*, p. 59, note 4.

⁵⁹ Bavli Berakhot 39b.

⁶⁰ Lewin, *Otzar*, p. 117, No. 326.

⁶¹ Cf. Rashi's commentary on Gen., 18:10 based on a Midrash found in *Sefer 'olam*, p. 5, quoted in Mordechai Katzenlengurgen, ed., *Torat Hayyim 'al Sefer Bereshit* (Jerusalem: The Rav Kook Institute, 1986), p. 211.

⁶² Jastrow, *A Dictionary*, p. 365.

⁶³ Ex. 12:22. "Take a bunch of hyssop, dip it in blood that is in the basin, and apply some of the blood that is in the basin to the lintel and to the two doorposts." The implication being that there were three dippings involved.

⁶⁴ Probably a reference to Gen. 17:12 and 27, where Abraham is commanded to circumcise every male dweller of his household, and a distinction is made among the slaves; this very same distinction should be considered when deciding who is included in the commandment to eat the *korban pesah*, according to Sherirah's opinion.

⁶⁵ See also Horovitz and Rabin, *Mekhilta, Masekhet de-Pisha, Bo*, Section 5, p. 14.

⁶⁶ Lewin, *Otzar*, p. 118, note 2.

⁶⁷ Lewin, *Otzar*, p. 118, No. 326.

⁶⁸ Hildesheimer, *Halachot Gedolot*, p. 292, and note 6 there.

⁶⁹ Goldschmidt, *Seder Rav Amram*, p. 116.

⁷⁰ Assaf, et al., *Siddur Saadiah*, p. 145.

⁷¹ Lewin, *Otzar*, p. 122, No. 338.

⁷² Bokser, *The Origins*, p. 37.

⁷³ Num. 9:11, though in reference to *pesah sheni*.

⁷⁴ Lewin, *Otzar*, p. 117, No. 326.

⁷⁵ Goldschmidt, *Seder*, p. 117, No. 82, line 137.

⁷⁶ Assaf, et al., *Siddur Saadiah*, p. 146.

⁷⁷ Lewin, *Otzar*, p. 120, No. 331.

⁷⁸ Judah D. Eisenstein, ed. *Otsar ha-Midrashim* (New York: J. D. Eisenstein, 1915), p. 551.

⁷⁹ Solomon Buber, ed. *Midrash Tehilim*, (Vilna: 1891), Psalm 18, No. 25.

⁸⁰ See Mishnah Megilah 4:1, 2, 10, for the usage of the word "*maftirin*."

⁸¹ Herbert Danby, ed. and trans. *The Mishnah* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1938), p. 151. He adds in note 9, "The joy of the Passover meal with its solemn symbolism must not degenerate into an ordinary convivial gathering."

⁸² Bokser, *The Origins*, p. 132, note 62.

⁸³ Goldschmidt, *Seder*, p. 117, No. 82, lines 138.

⁸⁴ Assaf, et al., *Siddur Saadiah*, p. 146.

⁸⁵ Lewin, *Otzar*, p. 118, No. 326.

⁸⁶ Goldschmidt, *Haggadah*, p. 61.

⁸⁷ Lewin, *Otzar*, p. 120, No. 327, and Goldschmidt, *Seder*, p. 122, No. 85.

⁸⁸ See Hoffman, "Liturgical Responses," pp. 220-224, for a discussion of the *birkat ha-mazon* in geonic responsa.

⁸⁹ See Berakhot 56a; cf. Rashi ad loc. for an explanation of *hallel mitzri*.

⁹⁰ Goldschmidt, *Seder*, p. 119, No. 84, line 19, "And the Halachah follows R. Judah, and this is the custom [*minhag*] in the two academies [Sura and Pumbedita].

⁹¹ After Yerushalmi Pesahim 10:1, where each of the four cups is attributed to one of the God's utterances mentioned in Ex. 6:6-7.

⁹² Hoffman, "Liturgical Responses," p. 197 ff.

⁹³ Hoffman, "Liturgical Responses," p. 198.

⁹⁴ Goldschmidt, *Seder*, p. 123, No. 87.

⁹⁵ Assaf, et al., *Siddur Saadia*, p. 148.

⁹⁶ Lewin, *Otzar*, p. 126, No. 351, and 127, No. 353.

⁹⁷ Lewin, *Otzar*, 124, Nos. 345, 346, 347 and 348.

⁹⁸ Hoffman, "Liturgical Responses," p. 195.

⁹⁹ Hoffman, "Liturgical Responses," p. 204.

¹⁰⁰ The idea behind it is that, if one recites the full *hallel* (as it is customary on *Rosh Hodesh* and other festive occasions) the blessing should read, "Blessed are You who has commanded us to finish (*ligmor*) the *hallel*," instead of the customary "to read (*likro*) the *hallel*."

¹⁰¹ Hoffman, "Liturgical Responses," p. 204. The reason Hoffman gives seems questionable. He claims that some people took Amram's advice only regarding the prohibition of reciting the *ligmor* blessing, but they thought it was acceptable to use other *hatimot* instead. He seems to derive this reconstruction of the history of the "switching" of the blessing for *hallel* from some later halachic authorities such as Moses of Coucy (thirteenth century, France) who in fact seemed to have misunderstood Amram. I think that Moses b. Jacob's interpretation only shows, at the most, his lack of understanding of geonic literature, but it doesn't account for Hai's textual variance. From the fact that the Sefaradim use nowadays the formula *ligmor*, one could derive that there were at least two different traditions as to which blessing should accompany the recitation of the Hallel during the Seder, and that Amram followed one and Hai another; one shouldn't conclude *lo pahot ve-lo yoter*.

¹⁰² Goldschmidt, *Haggadah*, p. 97.

¹⁰³ Mishnah Pesahim and Tosefta Pisha 10:1.

¹⁰⁴ Pesahim 108b.

¹⁰⁵ See the case of R. Judah in Nedarim 44b.

¹⁰⁶ Lewin, *Otzar*, p. 91, No. 221.

¹⁰⁷ Hoffman, "Liturgical Responses," pp. 204-205. See also Hildesheimer, *Halachot Gedolot*, p. 290, especially his note 1, which contains a detail of the passages in geonic literature which support this position.

¹⁰⁸ "arba kosot," in Solomon Zwein, ed., *Entziklopediah Talmudit*, (Jerusalem: Talmudic Encyclopedia, 1983), p. 160, especially note 42 and 43.

¹⁰⁹ *Shulhan Arukh*, 'Orah hayyim 472:9.

¹¹⁰ See "Arba kosot," in *Entziklopediah Talmudit*, for a detail of the sources on the measure and quality of the wine used for the four cups.

¹¹¹ Hildesheimer, *Halachot Gedolot*, p. 291 note 4.

¹¹² See "Arba kosot" in *Entziklopediah Talmudit*.

¹¹³ Bokser and Schiffman, *The Talmud*, p. 477.

¹¹⁴ The four verses in question are Jer. 25:15; 51:[6-]7; Ps. 75:9, and 11:6.

¹¹⁵ Lewin, *Otzar*, p. 127, No. 354.

¹¹⁶ Lewin, *Otzar*, p. 126, No. 351, especially note 2.

¹¹⁷ See Lewin, *Otzar*, p. 127, No. 355, for Hai's opposition to the fifth cup. See there especially his note 17 (and in English Hoffman, "Liturgical Responses," p. 201). Lewin identified the expression *minhag yafeh*, a seemingly approbation of this practice on the part of Hai, as a copyist's mistake who confused *yafeh* with a toponym, *Kispah* (after Ezra 8:17). Thus, Hai definitely opposed to the custom of the fifth cup.

¹¹⁸ See Molly Lyons Bar-David, "Haroset," *Encyclopedia Judaica*, CD ROM edition.

¹¹⁹ Bokser and Schiffman, *The Talmud*, p. 491, No. IIA.

¹²⁰ Assaf, et al., *Siddur Saadiah*, p. 135, lines 2-3.

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