

Haroset  
A Taste of Jewish History



Susan Weingarten

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*Haroset: A Taste of Jewish History*

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

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T

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*Susan Weingarten*

Jerusalem, Rosh HaShana 5779 – September 2018

## *Introduction: Texts and Tastes*

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

Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*<sup>1</sup>

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

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

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



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

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

#### **PASSOVER FOODS AND JEWISH IDENTITY**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **THE HISTORY OF HAROSET**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## *Haroset*

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

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

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

## *Chapter 1*

# On the Origins of Haroset

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

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

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1. Pesahim 116a; Y. Pesahim 37d.



## THE CREATION OF THE SEDER

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **What Are Talmudic Sources?**

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **Haroset in the Mishna**

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

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

They bring before [the leader of the Seder] unleavened bread (matza) and lettuce and the haroset, even though haroset is not a religious obligation (mitzva).

R. Elazar b. Tzadok says: 'It is a religious obligation.'" (Mishna Pesaḥim 10:3)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### An Earlier Hint of Haroset?

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

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

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

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8. Perhaps they were made of wood.