

Meals as Midrash: A Survey of Meals in Jewish Studies Scholarship
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At my synagogue in Providence, there's a sort of folk wisdom – remembered especially around Purim - that all Jewish holidays can be reduced to one succinct explanation: “They tried to get us, God rescued us, Let's eat!” We are a religion that solemnly prays ancient recipes or menus to mark each Sabbath or new moon. “Gastronomic Judaism” is the catchphrase among contemporary sociologists of Judaism to explain a modern secular form of Jewish identity. Blintzes and bagels make many of us “members of the tribe” more than the covenant at Sinai. Some say that the holiday observed by more Jews than any other is Passover – the one which centers on a big meal. Meals play such a central role in Jews and Judaism that to understand them is perhaps the most direct route to understanding the core values of Jewish tradition and its practitioners. This assumption and the experiences behind it are going to shape any discussion of meals and Judaism – no less mine. Therefore, it will not be enough to limit my survey to a synchronic analysis of what Jewish Studies tell us about meals in the Greco-Roman period – the main focus of our consultation. A significant number of Jewish approaches to meals are *diachronic* - how were the meal practices in question a reworking of earlier Biblical and Jewish traditions; into what were they transformed subsequently? *Meals themselves become “midrash” – perhaps the fundamental mode of “the Jewish worldview”* (if there is such a thing). Sometimes it's explicit – when ritualized words, table talk are linked to the eating to make a point – table blessings, the Haggadah narrative at the Passover seder, any “words of Torah spoken over the table.” And sometimes it's implicit, subconscious. Is there some deeply engrained archetypal Jewish mechanism for making distinctions – *havdalot*? How do we know mayonnaise on white bread is “*treyf*”, but eating Chinese pork and shrimp on Christmas Eve is “*kosher*”? It's Leviticus secularized, a priestly sensibility transposed to a new, post-

Enlightenment mentality – a modern secular way to mark one’s Jewish identity – even though you’ll never find *these* “dietary laws” written in the Torah! (But maybe in a Lenny Bruce comedy routine.) And it’s not only a modern phenomenon. 16th century Marranos preferred to cook with oil over butter; 12th century Jewish boys in medieval Ashkenaz (Germany) ate the sweet words of Torah baked into little cakes while their Christian neighbors ingested the blood and body of Christ in their churches. In place of the long destroyed Temple altar, every Jewish table became a substitute *mikdash me’at* - a “little Temple” - a microcosm of Jewish experience. Jews intuitively seem to gravitate to meals as ritual strategies to link themselves to *and* to differentiate themselves from past history, present neighbors, and future hopes or fears. Every Jewish meal, or at least any self-consciously Jewish meal – however broadly one defines “Jewish” – is, in a sense, **a feast of history** - what Chaim Raphael aptly called the Passover seder. It’s always a statement about history, within history – on some subconscious level.

Therefore I will survey “Meals and Jewish Studies” so as to try to do justice both to my sense of the diachronic dimension of meals in Judaism and Jewish studies, and to the specific expectations of our group whose focus is after all on meals in the Greco-Roman period. I’ll do this in two parts. As per my mandate, I first will enumerate what I think are the most influential ideas that the field of Jewish studies has contributed to the understanding of meals in the Greco-Roman period. I will at times refer the broader range of scholarship on meals in Jewish Studies, of which the Jewish meals in our period are but a part. It’s particularly because this scholarship (even though it’s technically beyond the purview of an SBL research project) has fruitfully informed my own scholarship on Jewish meals in the Greco-Roman period that I’ve run the risk of moving into areas that some of you might at first sight consider tangential. Then, I will conclude with directions for further investigation of Jewish, Christian and other Greco-Roman

meals in the Hellenistic period suggested by the current research on “Meals and Jewish Studies.” Consider it a sort of *afikomen* (“dessert”) to a rather filling banquet of Jewish studies.

Jewish Studies have contributed certain key ideas to the understanding of meals in the Greco-Roman world. I'll state what I think are the most important ideas in the following eight theses:

1. The Pharisees were a table fellowship group
2. The Passover Seder was a symposium
3. Jewish meal rituals replaced the Biblical Temple sacrifices
4. Jewish meal rituals combine food and table talk
5. Distinguishing between fit and unfit foods is a crucial component of Jewish meals
6. Meals establish Jewish identity; they function to differentiate competing Jewish groups from one another and between Jews and Gentiles
7. Jewish meal practices tend to be less ascetic than Christian and other Greco-Roman philosophical groups.
8. There's a tension between vegetarianism and meat-eating in Jewish meals.

Most of these theses are generally accepted both within Jewish studies and in the cognate fields of my colleagues on the panel of this consultation that depend on this research. Some, such as the first and second theses (“The Pharisees were a table fellowship group” and “the Passover Seder was a symposium”), are more controversial. But even so, these controversies are significant and recurring parts of the discussion of meals in Jewish studies. And two of these theses, that Jewish “meal rituals combine food and table talk” and that “there's a tension between vegetarianism and meat-eating in Jewish meals” are probably too new to the discussion to have generated either universal acclaim or controversy. Moreover, since I have written about both these “new” topics, and affirm the positions as stated above in the “controversial” theses, it is certainly fair to say that this list represents my idiosyncrasies and biases. Nevertheless, based on my observation of the field, including my recent participation in the 15th Annual Klutznick-Harris Symposium devoted to Food and Judaism in Omaha, NE, I think that I am not reading too much into the

scholarship. Indeed, I think my eight theses might provide some useful guideposts to navigate the rich and varied territory of meals in Jewish Studies. As their import may not be completely self-evident, especially the newer theses, let me briefly go through them.

The Pharisees were a table fellowship group

The impact of Jacob Neusner's thesis in *From Politics to Piety: The Emergence of Pharisaic Judaism* that the Pharisees were a table fellowship group has been profound and widespread in New Testament and Jewish studies.¹ Baruch Bokser, whose book on *The Origins of the Passover Seder* has in its own right contributed much to the discussion of meals in Jewish studies, assumes Neusner's position on the Pharisees and thus nicely summarizes it as follows:

...The activities of the Pharisees apparently were centered on a table fellowship. Meals enabled them to express their piety and belief that God's presence was not limited to the temple, but could be experienced in one's home. Therefore, the Pharisees taught that people should prepare and eat a regular meal as priests prepare and eat consecrated food.²

In my own view their procedures for acquiring food and maintaining households or other spaces fit for such gatherings were strategies to influence non-Pharisees to "convert" to Pharisaism.³

Also following Neusner, New Testament scholar Gerd Theissen argues that these practices were a programmatic "intensification of Jewish norms," which distinguished the Pharisees from other Jewish renewal movements in first century Palestine.⁴ Similarly, Marcus Borg says that the earliest Christian traditions about Jesus and his followers understood the Pharisees as a "holiness

¹ E.g., Martin Jaffee, *Early Judaism* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1997) pp.79-82; Baruch Bokser, *The Origins of the Seder: The Passover Rite and Early Rabbinic Judaism* (Berkeley, CA: University of California, 1984) pp. 7,11; Saldarini, *Pharisees, Scribes, and Sadducees.*; Borg, *Conflict, Holiness, and Politics*, pp. 307, 139-140; and E. P. Sanders, *Jewish Law from Jesus to the Mishnah* (London/Philadelphia: SCM/Trinity, 1990), p.167, though Sanders claims to disagree with Neusner. However, it seems that all Sanders is saying is that Pharisees were interested in purity, but they were not exceptional among other Jews for being so (pp.245, cf. p.242).

² Bokser, *Origins of the Seder*, p. 11.

³ Jonathan Brumberg-Kraus, "Were the Pharisees a Conversionist Sect? Table Fellowship as a Strategy of Conversion," 2002 <<http://acunix.wheatonma.edu/jkraus/articles/Pharisees.htm>> (6 November 2002).

⁴ Gerd Theissen, *The Sociology of Early Palestinian Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), pp. 77-99.

movement" *actively competing against* the "mercy movement" of Jesus.⁵ The Pharisees' characteristic behavior of eating tithed, ordinary food in a state of ritual purity had special, symbolic importance in the competition for followers among various Jewish renewal movements of the first century.⁶ Neusner's discussion of the Pharisees as a table fellowship group is complemented by the earlier studies of rabbinic traditions about *haverim*, *ne'emanim*, and their antithesis, the *ammei ha-aretz*.⁷ The *havurot*, whom many scholars identify with the Pharisees, distinguished their full members "*haverim*" from initiates or novices "*ne'emanim*" and from non-members "*ammei ha-aretz*" on the basis of the food-tithing and purity rules for eating that they did or did not take on themselves.⁸ The *havurot* probably introduced the "Blessing of Invitation" (*birkat ha-zimmun*),⁹ a call-response prayer formula introducing the recitation of a grace after the meal, and were probably the groups from which the rabbinic Passover seder itself emerged.¹⁰ Many scholars identify these rabbinic *haverim* and *ne'emanim* with the Pharisees of the New Testament, and the "tax collectors and sinners" with the *ammei ha-aretz*, though some demur.¹¹ Finally, the *havurot* of the second temple period, whether Pharisaic, Essene, or groups like Philo's Therapeutae, with their communal lists of rules and their communal meals were analogous to other Greco-Roman voluntary associations (funereal clubs, professional guilds,

⁵ Borg, *Conflict*, esp. pp.73-143.

⁶ Marcus Borg, *Conflict, Holiness, and Politics in the Teaching of Jesus* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1984), pp.93ff.

⁷ Lieberman, J. Heineman, A. Oppenheimer.

⁸ S. Lieberman, "The Discipline of the So-Called Dead Sea Manual of Discipline," *JBL* 71 (1952), pp. 199-206. Among the relevant texts are *M.Dem.* 2:2-3[but not R. Judah's description of a *haver* in 2:3]; 4:2; 6:9; *T.Dem.*2:15-24; 3:1-9; also *M.Tohar.*7:4; 8:5; *M.Git.*5:9.

⁹ Joseph Heinemann, "Birkat Ha-Zimmun and Havurah Meals," *JJS* (1962), pp. 23-29. See *M. Ber.* 7:1, when three or more people (even a table server or a Samaritan) have eaten together "*demai*-produce, or First Tithe [*ma'aser rishon*] from which the Heave-offering [*terumato*] had been taken, or Second Tithe [*ma'aser sheni*] or dedicated produce [*hekdesch*] that had been redeemed," one of them is required to "invite [*le-zamen*]" the others to recite *Birkat ha-Zimmun*.

¹⁰ J. Tabory, *Pesah Dorot: Perakim Be-toldot Layl Ha-Seder* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1996) pp. -51.

¹¹ I make a case for the identification in "Were the Pharisees a Conversionist Sect?" but Saldarini, *Pharisees, Scribes, and Sadducees*, pp.216-220 and S. Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah*, p. 158, question it.

religious associations, etc.); they were basically Jewish versions of these Hellenistic private clubs in which members typically assembled for communal meals.¹² It is significant that the rabbinic Judaism of the Mishnah and Talmud look back to the Pharisees, that is, a table fellowship group, as the founders of their new religious program. For even though Torah study rather than eating becomes the central focus of rabbinic Judaism, the Pharisees' legacy is quite apparent in the continued emphasis on meals as the ritual *means* to realize their ideals, i.e., in institutions like table blessings, the Passover seder, *derekh erez* rules for meal etiquette, not to mention *kashrut*. Thus, it is still wherever “three have *eaten at one table* and have spoken over it words of the Torah, it is as if they had eaten from the table of God.” (M.Avot 3:3)

The Passover Seder was a symposium

A second major contribution of Jewish Studies to meals in the Greco-Roman world is idea that the Passover seder was a Greco-Roman symposium. This thesis has opened two especially fruitful lines of inquiry, namely, about the relationship between Jewish and Hellenistic culture, and the relationship between actual meal practices and literary texts about them. Siegfried Stein's seminal article "The Influence of Symposium Literature on the Literary form of the *Pesah Haggadah*," though originally published in the *Journal of Jewish Studies* in 1966,¹³ became widely known in Jewish studies circles through its inclusion in Henry Fischel's anthology *Essays In Greco-Roman And Related Talmudic Literature*, a collection of essays specifically intended to break down the excessive dichotomization of "Judaism vs. Hellenism" characteristic of much previous Jewish scholarship.¹⁴ Stein noted that many of the features of the

¹² B. Dombrowski, "'Yahad' in 1QS and 'to koinon': An Instance of Early Greek and Jewish Synthesis," *HTR* 59 (1966) 293-307. M. Delcor, "Repas Cultuels Esséniens et Thérapeutes, Thiases et Haburoth," *RQ* 6 (1968) 401-425.

¹³ Siegfried Stein, "The Influence of Symposium Literature on the Literary form of the *Pesah Haggadah* *JJS* 8 (1957) pp. 13-44.

¹⁴ Henry A. Fischel, ed., *Essays In Greco-Roman And Related Talmudic Literature* (selected with a prolegomenon by [the editor]; New York: KTAV, 1976.

Passover seder, such as “the four questions,” the emphasis on reclining, the convention of talking about the food on the table or other topics related to the meal practices, games and word play, a hymn at the end (Hallel) etc. had many parallels in Greco-Roman symposium literature. However, the two most important subsequent book length treatments of the Passover seder, Bokser’s *Origins of the Seder* and Joseph Tabory’s *Pesah Dorot* (“*The Passover Ritual Through the Generations*”) come down on different sides of Stein’s thesis.¹⁵ Bokser says the Passover Seder is not a symposium; Tabory says it is, as do I.¹⁶ The issue really at stake in this controversy is an old one: was Judaism influenced by "Hellenism?" Thus, though Bokser concedes that participation in wider Hellenistic culture was a factor "shaping [the] Passover seder and the formation of early rabbinic Judaism in general," he cannot accept Stein's argument that "symposium literature 'gave the *impetus*' "to the form of the Passover seder as it stands before us."¹⁷ Rather, the internal Jewish historical crisis of the loss of the Temple in Jerusalem shaped the form of the rabbinic seder.¹⁸ Bokser, in an approach typical of much modern Jewish critical scholarship, insists on the decisive impact of internal, autonomous Jewish factors on Jewish religious texts rather than on external Hellenistic cultural influences. However, I see no reason why symposium conventions and the loss of the Temple in 70 C.E. could not both be decisive factors shaping the form of the early rabbinic *seder*.¹⁹ In any case, I think that the thesis that the Passover *seder* is a symposium has done much to advance more sophisticated understandings of the profound interaction between Biblical/Jewish and Greco-Roman cultural conventions for meals. In addition the thesis has led to a deeper exploration of the relationship

¹⁵ Bokser, *Origins of the Seder*, pp. ?; Tabory, *Pesah Dorot*, pp. 367-77; and for his argument in English, see Joseph Tabory, “Towards a History of the Paschal Meal,” in *Passover and Easter: Origin and History to Modern Times (Two Liturgical Traditions v.5)*; ed. Paul Bradshaw and Lawrence Hoffman; Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame, 1999) pp. 62-80.

¹⁶ Jonathan Brumberg-Kraus, *Memorable Meals* (forthcoming), pp. 10-13.

¹⁷ Bokser, *Origins of the Seder*, pp. 12, 52-53.

¹⁸ Bokser, *Origins of the Seder*, p. 12

between meal rituals and texts about or otherwise related to them, especially in my own work.²⁰ Some studies of the Passover *seder* as a symposium seem to confuse the symposium as a performed ritual with symposium texts that are literary representations of meals.²¹ Thus, they miss the important point that the literary representation of Jewish meals according to symposium literary conventions are themselves significant interpretations and transformations of experienced rituals into conceptual ideals. The Passover *seder* in Chapter 10 of *M. Pesahim* is a literary idealization of Jewish meal practices according to early rabbinic values, just as the wide variety of Socratic, encyclopedic, and satirical literary symposia, as well as sympotic lists of meal rules, and stylized meal scenes imbedded in fictional narratives are idealizations of other extra-textual Greco-Roman meal practices, according to the particular ideological values of their authors.²² The literary representation of symposia according to the conventions of the genres turns "actual" meal settings and practices into objects of intellectual reflection, to be contrasted with one another, to be preferred or rejected, or simply to demonstrate that proponents of the various schools represented at banquets do or do not practice what they preach.²³ Tabory and I offer broad sketches of the historical development of the literary genres of symposia in order to situate the Passover *seder* within them. Tabory does this to suggest that development of the Passover Haggadah from a midrash on Deut. 26:5-8: "My father was a wandering Aramean..." to the lengthy rite in *m. Pesahim* 10 prescribing the explanation of the foods at the table, parallels

¹⁹ Jonathan Brumberg-Kraus, *Memorable Meals* (forthcoming), pp.12-13, 17.

²⁰ Jonathan Brumberg-Kraus, "'Not by Bread Alone...': Food and Drink in the Rabbinic Seder and in the Last Supper," special issue of *Semeia* 86: *Food and Drink in the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament* (ed. by Athalya Brenner and Jan Willem van Henten; 1999), 154-179 and *Memorable Meals: Symposia in Luke's Gospel, The Rabbinic Seder and the Greco-Roman Literary Tradition* (forthcoming).

²¹ E.g., Stein, "The Influence of Symposium Literature," (even though he says that he's examining the Passover Haggadah as an example of the genre of symposium literature); Gordon J. Bahr, "The Seder of Passover." *NovT* 12 (1970), pp. 181-202; and Gillian Feeley-Harnik, *The Lord's Table: Eucharist and Passover in Early Christianity*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1981.

²² Brumberg-Kraus, *Memorable Meals*, pp. 70-110.

²³ Brumberg-Kraus, *Memorable Meals*, pp. 109-110.

the literary development of Greco-Roman symposia. Tabory says Greco-Roman symposia developed from a first stage of Socratic symposia that focus on the dramatic intellectual dialogues between the meal participants, to second and third stages of symposia that describe the food (i.e., stage 2: Plutarch's "Convivial Questions" and the Roman satirical symposia; stage 3: the encyclopedic symposium of Athenaeus' *Deipnosophistae*).²⁴ Remarkably, though, Tabory claims that only with Athenaeus (stage 3) had "the sympotic literature...developed into a *literary genre rather than descriptions of actual symposia*." In contrast, I treat *all* the examples of symposium literature as different *literary* genres and sub-genres, in order to identify the Passover seder in *m. Pesahim* 10 as a specific sub-genre of symposium literature. It is a "list of meal rules" loosely imbedded in rabbinic "dialogues," analogous at least in form to the list of banquet rules imbedded in Lucian's comic dialogue *Saturnalia*.²⁵ Moreover, I stress that the Passover seder form represents a conscious and intentional choice of one symposium literary form over other available ones, because it was the right medium for the ideological message the rabbis wanted to convey - instead of it being the inevitable result of symposium literature's linear historical development, as Tabory seems to imply. My bottom line: the sympotic features and form of the Passover seder were not incidental accretions or unconscious developments. The symposium literary tradition provided the composers of *Mishnah Pesahim* 10, as well as their ideological rivals, with a wide range of options from which to choose to idealize their characteristic communal meals. Their choices were intentional, and were recognized as such – if at the very least to distinguish their way as preferable to others. It's a symposium convention itself to assert or imply that "we conduct ourselves at the table in enlightened and decorous ways, while our rivals don't," or as *m. Pesahim* 10 puts it, "After the passover offering, one does not

²⁴ Tabory, "Towards a History of the Paschal Meal," pp.65-69.

²⁵ Brumberg-Kraus, *Memorable Meals*, pp. 45-46.

end with *afikomen*,” [=epikomion – “after-dinner revelry] – that is, like everybody else besides us does! Bokser’s, Tabory’s, and my discussion of the Passover seder (as well as other Jewish studies scholars’) also emphasize the points that Jewish meal rituals replace the Temple sacrifices, link eating and table-talk, and differentiate Jewish groups from one another and from non-Jews. However, because their significance for understanding Jewish meals goes far beyond the Passover seder, I will treat each of these points in their own right.

Jewish meal rituals replaced the Biblical Temple sacrifices

The thesis that Jewish meal rituals replaced the Biblical Temple sacrifices is widely recognized and accepted, but nevertheless can still be further nuanced. Certainly, the important studies of Neusner on the Pharisees, and Bokser on the Passover seder stress this point. However, this thesis raises almost as many questions as it answers. First, how does one account for the fact that Jewish groups like the Pharisees, Essenes, Jewish Christians, and Greek-speaking Egyptian Jews were conducting meals apparently as alternatives to the Temple sacrifices even before the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE?²⁶ Secondly, why are meals per se preferred as an alternative to the Temple sacrifices? After all, it is a commonplace in early rabbinic, Qumran, or early Christian literature that prayer replaces sacrifices, or study of the sacrifices replaces sacrifice, or Jesus is the new sacrifice!²⁷ The study of rabbinic transformations of Biblical cultic language is particularly instructive in this regard.²⁸ For on the one hand we have statements like

‘This is the *torah* of the burnt offering [*olah*], the grain offering [*minhah*], the sin

²⁶ See especially B. Bokser, Philo's *Description of Jewish Practices*. (Center for Hermeneutical Studies in Hellenistic and Modern Culture; *Protocol of the Thirtieth Colloquy*; Berkeley, CA, 1977); *Origins of the Seder*, pp. 4-8, 14-28.

²⁷ See Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, "Cultic Language in Qumran and the New Testament," *CBQ* 18 (1976) pp. 159-177;

²⁸ E.g., Baruch Bokser, "Ma'al and Blessings over Food: Rabbinic Transformations of Cultic Terminology and Alternative Forms of Piety," *JBL* 100 (1981) pp. 557-574; Jonathan Brumberg-Kraus, "Meat-eating and Jewish Identity: Ritualization of the Priestly 'Torah of Beast and Fowl' [Lev. 11:46] in Rabbinic Judaism and in Medieval Kabbalah," *Association for Jewish Studies Review*, 24/2 (1999), 227-262.

offering [*hattat*], the guilt offering [*'asham*], etc.' Whoever engages in the study of the Torah portion on '*olah*' is as if he sacrificed an '*olah*' the portion on *minhah*, as if he sacrificed a *minhah*, the portion on *hattat*, as if he sacrificed a *hattat*...²⁹

from *B.Menahot* 110 or from the Passover seder in *M.Pesachim* 10: "Rabban Gamaliel said, 'Whoever did not say these three things on Passover did not fulfill his obligation: *pesah*, *matzah*, and *merorim*,'" suggesting that it is enough to *study* or *talk* about sacrificial foods. On the other hand, *M.Avot* 3:3 states that torah study at ordinary meals makes them like priestly sacrifices, and meals without torah talk are like sacrilege:

R. Simeon said, 'Three who have eaten at one table and have not said words of Torah over it, it is as if they have eaten from sacrifices of the dead [*mi-zivhei metim*] ...But if three have eaten at one table and have spoken over it words of Torah, it as if they have eaten from the table of God, as it is written (Ezek. 41:22), 'And he told me: This is the table that stands before the Lord.'

Are the Pharisees or rabbis claiming that their meals, blessings, and study of the sacrifices are *instead of the sacrifices*, or *are* like the sacrifices? As I have stated elsewhere, whereas the Bible advocates the

torot of the priests and their sacrifices, not the master/disciple relationship...as the basis of Israelite cultural identity [, t]he rabbinic interpretations wrench these holiness and purity rules out the priestly sacrificial system, [and] cast...them almost entirely in the language and institutions of their own rabbinic concerns, namely the master/disciple relationship. The master/disciple relationship tends to supplant even family and kinship ties as the primary "affective relationship" in Judaism.³⁰ In the language of the cultural anthropology of honor and shame, the "acquired honor" of Torah learning has replaced the "ascribed honor" of family lineage as the primary criterion for leadership and social status in the rabbinic system.³¹ In this context, the dietary rules are to foster distinctions between *talmidei hakhamim* and '*ammei ha-'arets*' rather than priests, Israelites and non-Israelites (familial, ethnic, hereditary statuses). *Sacred study replaces sacred eating, sacred teachers supplant priestly officiants at sacrifices*; by playing down the blood ties

²⁹ B.Menahot 110.

³⁰ Jaffee, "Rabbinic Ontology," 6.

³¹ Stanley Stowers pointed out the relevance of this distinction when I made this point in a paper for the Brown University Seminar on Mediterranean Religions in Antiquity. For a clear exposition of "honor/shame" theory and its applicability to first century Judaism, see Bruce Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights From Cultural Anthropology*, rev. ed, Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1993, 28-62, esp. 33-34.

reinforced by sacrificial sharing of meat, the rabbis legitimate their new Torah learning based authority. Consequently, the written priestly *torot* of Leviticus require rabbinic Oral Torah for clarification, specification, and application, and it is enough to study the priestly *torot* rather than do them.³²

By playing down the actual eating of the food, and emphasizing substitute actions – the rabbis compare themselves to priests primarily to assert that they have replaced the priests. On the other hand, later medieval kabbalistic traditions revive the sacrificial language, and restore the theurgic priestly dimension to the meal rituals of rabbinic scholars so that their *eating* as well as their study has a theurgic world-regenerating function.³³ This historical development of the use of Biblical cultic language is especially apparent in changing interpretations of meat-eating in the verse “this is the torah of beast and fowl...” in its Biblical context, and in rabbinic and medieval kabbalistic literature.³⁴

The dominant attitudes toward meat-eating at these key stages reflect the development of more basic patterns in the history of Jewish religion. The term "torah" had a dual meaning of teaching and practice. It was both the lore priests taught each other and other Israelites, and the sacrificial and purificatory rituals the priests, and the Israelites as a "kingdom of priests," were themselves to perform. Thus, "the torah of beast and fowl" in Lev 11:46 reflected the original dual connotation of Torah. It was both a doctrine (about animal meat fit or unfit to eat) that the priests were to teach the Israelites, and prescribed dietary rituals to be performed (on the one hand to differentiate Israelites from non-Israelites, priests from non-priests, on the other hand in order to maintain theurgically YHWH's presence among them). Later rabbinic tradition tended to separate these roles, stressing the value of teaching and studying priestly lore over its

³² Brumberg-Kraus, "Meat-Eating and Jewish Identity," p.249-50.

³³ Brumberg-Kraus, "Meat-Eating and Jewish Identity," p. 257.

performance in sacrificial rites. The rabbinic sages kept the metaphor of priesthood to sacralize their status, but redefined its qualifications: learned expertise in rabbinic Oral and Written Torah rather than the hereditary birthright of the priesthood. In this view, meat-eating becomes a privilege denied to those who are ignorant of the Torah. Kabbalah however tended to recombine these roles, reviving the language of the sacrificial system to emphasize the equal value of study (of the "secrets of the Torah") and ritual performance.³⁵ Kabbalah couched its theory of transmigration of souls in the language of the sacrifices, so that meat-eating becomes an opportunity for the "enlightened ones" to unite their esoteric knowledge with actual ritual performance of eating in a single, cosmos-regenerating action.³⁶ Here is also an important instance when looking at Jewish meals outside the period of late Greco-Roman antiquity is helpful for determining what is distinctive about them during this period. Finally, a common thread in the discussion of Jewish meal rituals as replacements for the Biblical sacrifices is the frequent and self-consciously intentional presence of words at or about the table that make it a "Jewish" table, e.g., blessings, psalms, "words of Torah," "engagement in the study of sacrifices," explanations of the foods, etc. That brings us to our next thesis, that Jewish meal rituals combine food and table talk.

Jewish meal rituals combine food and table talk

Words at the Jewish meal, even apart from the particular foods eaten, are one of the main features that distinguish Jewish meals as *Jewish*. We've already seen how the words prescribed for the Passover seder - the telling of the story, and especially the words

³⁴ Brumberg-Kraus, "Meat-Eating and Jewish Identity," pp. 227-262.

³⁵ See especially Joel Hecker, "Eating Gestures And The Ritualized Body In Medieval Jewish Mysticism," *History of Religions* 40/2 (2000) pp. 125-152; *Each Man Ate an Angel's Meal: Eating and Embodiment in the Zohar*, Dissertation, New York University, Ann Arbor, MI: UMI, 1996.

explaining the symbolism of the food - the passover lamb, the matzah, and the bitter herb (*maror*) - are important. After all, were one to use different words, let's say, that the Passover lamb or the matzah at the table is the body of Christ, and the wine his blood, it would give the meal a completely different character; it would make it a Christian meal! Words at the table, whether the Passover table, or the table for other Jewish meals, such as blessings over the food, or "*divrei torah*" ("words of Torah") have an important ritual function in linking the particular actions of eating to the general or a certain sectarian Jewish myth. When one says "Blessed are You YHWH our God, King of the Universe, who creates the fruit of the vine" or "who commanded us concerning [the washing of] the hands" or "who brings forth bread from the earth," or "Blessed is YHWH our God from whose table we have eaten," in Hebrew, one is affirming the fundamental Jewish myths that YHWH created the world at the beginning of time, that the food and drink served on the table are more or less the direct result of that creation *in illo tempore*, that the God YHWH whom we directly address as "You" has personally commanded us to wash our hands (presumably from Mt. Sinai), and that it is indeed from His food that we have eaten [*she-akhalnu mi shelo*](as if we were like the priests?).³⁷ If we were Qumran sectarians, we'd allude to the messianic array of the myriads of the armies of God joining our small group, at least in our apocalyptic imagination, when we recite our distinctive grace after the meal.³⁸ If we were Jewish Christians, "every time [we'd] eat this bread and drink this cup [of the Eucharist, we'd] *proclaim* the death of the Lord until he comes."³⁹ Thus, I disagree fundamentally with Neusner when he claims Pharisaic and Qumran Essenic

³⁶ Brumberg-Kraus, "Meat-Eating and Jewish Identity," p.256-257.

³⁷ Brumberg-Kraus, "Were the Pharisees a Conversionist Sect?" p.20.

³⁸ 1 *QS* 6:3-7; 1 *QSa* 2:17-18. See Brumberg-Kraus, "Were the Pharisees a Conversionist Sect?" p.20 n70.

³⁹ I Cor 11:26.

table fellowship, despite their liturgical components, were not "intense ritual meal[s], ... [their] eating was not a ritualized occasion, " and thus decisively different from their early Christian counterparts.⁴⁰ On the contrary, the "things said," (as per Jane Harrison's theory of ritual), the words at the Jewish meals, are one of the most important components for transforming the ordinary activities of eating into ritualized occasions.⁴¹ Rituals are "modes of paying attention." The words that introduce, conclude, or otherwise comment on an action - whether during the performance of rituals, or as glosses on written accounts of them - all call attention to ordinary activities, that is, "ritualize" otherwise unconsciously habitual or accidental actions.⁴² Indeed, it is not surprising that the Second Temple period proponents of Jewish meals found Hellenistic symposium conventions so amenable. Perhaps the most characteristic symposium literary convention is the use of *faits divers*, incidental events or "props," especially those "naturally" found at the dinner table, as pretexts for playfully learned discussions.

While this is fairly self-evident for Jewish table blessings and the Passover rite prescribed in *m.Pesahim* 10, the ritualization of Torah study at the table, "*divrei ha-torah al shulhan*" ["words of Torah about the table/over the table"] is another striking development in the rabbinic meal. Ze'ev Gries, in his study of a relatively modern Jewish literary genre, *sifrei hanhagot*, popular manuals of ethics and ritual practices, discusses

⁴⁰ Neusner, *From Politic to Piety*, p.89.

⁴¹ As I've argued elsewhere ("Were the Pharisees a Conversionist Sect?" p. 20):

The religious function of many rabbinic blessings, and *Birkat ha-Zimmun* in particular, is to invoke the presence of God for otherwise ordinary human activities: eating, smelling, seeing, recovery from sickness, marriage, etc. Blessings that allude to what God created in the beginning ("...who creates the fruit of the vine") or how God sits on his throne in heaven with his heavenly entourage put the natural human activities of convivial eating and drinking in a supernatural, mythic context. Blessings are abbreviated myths, ritual shorthand to evoke the longer Biblical myths of creation, revelation, and redemption -- of the past, present, and future kingdom of God.

⁴² B. Bokser, "Ritualizing the Seder," *JAAR* 56 (1988) p.445; cf. J. Z. Smith, "The Bare Facts of Ritual," *HR* 20 (1980) pp. 113-115; Brumberg-Kraus, "'Not by Bread Alone...': Food and Drink in the Rabbinic Seder and in the Last

earlier precedents for this type of literature in the interpretations of what should now be a familiar passage for us, *m. Avot* 3:3: "But if three have eaten at one table and have spoken over it words of the Torah, it is as if they had eaten from the table of God, etc." The rabbinic and medieval classical Jewish tradition turns this from a description to a prescription: one *ought* to speak words of Torah over the table.⁴³ This prescription is then taken in two directions. Either recitation of the grace after the meals, *birkat ha-mazon*, which includes quotations and allusions to Torah, suffices to fulfill this obligation. Or one is literally required to engage in a give-and-take discussion of Torah verses over the table in addition to the required blessings.⁴⁴ And at least one medieval rabbi, Rabbenu Bahya ben Asher, goes a step further to advocate that one must "speak words of Torah about the table" over the table, playing on the double meaning of the preposition *al* in the original rabbinic quotation from *m. Avot* 3:3.⁴⁵ "Rabbenu Bahya creates new rituals by having people say or concentrate on specific scriptural metaphors at the specific time they are gathered together for communal meals."⁴⁶ That in effect turns the meals themselves into performances of the scriptural metaphors: *this* table over which students of the sages are presently discussing scriptural passages and eating their meal is indeed "the table which is before the LORD" (Ez 41:22); it's at this table here and now that the elite of the children of Israel "have envisioned God while eating and drinking."⁴⁷ (Ex 24:11)⁴⁸ Jewish meals become an occasion to "ritualize metaphors," the

Supper," special issue of *Semeia* 86: *Food and Drink in the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament* (ed. by Athalya Brenner and Jan Willem van Henten; 1999) p.169.

⁴³ Zeev Gries, *Sifrut ha-hanhagot: toldoteha u-mekomah be-haye haside R.Yisra'el Ba'al Shem-Tov* (Tel Aviv: Mosad Bialik, 1989) pp.18-22.

⁴⁴ Gries, *Sifrut ha-hanhagot*, pp. 21-22.

⁴⁵ R. Bahya ben Asher, *Shulhan Shel Arba*, (ed. C. Chavel; Chapter 1) p. 474; Jonathan Brumberg-Kraus, "The Ritualization of Scripture in Rabbenu Bahya ben Asher's Eating Manual *Shulhan Shel Arba*," (forthcoming) p.3.

⁴⁶ Brumberg-Kraus, "The Ritualization of Scripture," p.3.

⁴⁷ Brumberg-Kraus, "The Ritualization of Scripture," pp.4-5.

canonical metaphors of scripture.⁴⁹ Though this example from a 13th century kabbalistic ethical manual is from a much different place and time than the Greco-Roman world that's our focus, one can see a very similar phenomenon earlier in the rabbinic seder, when the Mishnah prescribes that one eats the symbolic foods matzah and maror, over which certain scriptural verses have been recited. It's as if one is eating both the scripture and the food that "carries" it. In this, the meal becomes a sort of experiential midrash on the scriptural verses, a way of making ancient texts "real" and relevant to one's contemporary experience.

Distinguishing between fit and unfit foods is a crucial component of Jewish meals

There is no question that Mary Douglas' theory emphasizing the importance of distinctions between animals prohibited and permitted for food, and Israelite abhorrence of anomalous mixtures have has a profound impact on the dietary laws in Jewish studies.⁵⁰ Even though scholars such as Milgrom and Levine in their commentaries on Leviticus disagree with her on matters of detail and emphasis, they still recognize that the command to "be holy" has something to do with distinguishing between fit and unfit foods. So other principles of distinction are operative besides the abhorrence of animals whose mode of locomotion isn't consistent with the division of nature that's their main habitat, i.e., birds that can't fly, sea animals that crawl rather than swim, bunnies that hop rather walk on the ground like cattle and sheep. Thus Levine argues that animals that eat other animals tend to be prohibited. And Milgrom suggests that the distinction between clean and unclean animals is but one of several

⁴⁸ R. Bahya b. Asher, *Shulhan Shel Arba*, pp. 492-3; Brumberg-Kraus, "The Ritualization of Scripture," p.10.

⁴⁹ Ivan Marcus uses the term "ritualization of metaphors" to interpret medieval Northern European Jewish eating rituals in his book, *The Rituals of Childhood* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996) cf. esp. 5-7.

⁵⁰ Mary Douglas, "The Abominations of Leviticus," *Purity and Danger* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966); "Deciphering a Meal," in *Food and Culture: A Reader* (edited by Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik; New York, NY: Routledge, 1997) pp. 36-54.

important ethical principles behind the dietary rules, such as the avoidance of the lifeblood of animals, the prohibition of the cruelty of cooking an animal in its mother's milk; indeed for him the prohibition of the life blood, the "*dam* which is the *nefesh*" seems to be the most important ethical principle. David Kraemer has been exploring the rabbinic transformation of the Biblical prohibition against cooking a kid in its mother milk into the more blanket prohibition against eating any milk and meat products together, and the corollary specification of durations of time between eating milk and meat, as well as the separation of dishes. In papers I've heard at the 2002 SBL Meeting and Klutznick-Harris Symposium on Food and Judaism, Kraemer has shown that the rabbinic developments of the original Biblical prohibition are hardly obvious, natural, or logically inevitable, and that the codification of such separations occurred much later than one might suspect. Why post-Biblical Judaism chose to emphasize the separation of milk and meat products when eating or preparing them when it did and the way it did still seems to be an open question. To a certain extent, Douglas' implication that there is a Jewish systemic abhorrence for mixing species – *kelaim* - probably has something to do with the intensified emphasis on separating milk and meat foods, but that does not really address the ideological significance of the rabbinic innovations regarding the separation of milk and meat in their particular historical and cultural contexts.

Meals establish Jewish identity; they function to differentiate competing Jewish groups from one another and between Jews and Gentiles

The consensus of recent Jewish scholarship, as reflected in the recent commentaries on Leviticus by Baruch Levine and Jacob Milgrom is that the main purpose of the Torah's dietary laws are to primarily to distinguish Israelites from non-Israelites. Thus Levine says in the *JPS Torah Commentary, on Leviticus*, "underlying all the dietary regulations is a broad social

objective: maintaining a distance between the Israelites and their neighbors."⁵¹ . Similarly, in the conclusion to his discussion of Mary Douglas' theory of animals prohibited and permitted for food, Milgrom notes the insight of the Christianity's founders,

to end once and for all the notion that God had covenanted himself with a certain people who would keep itself apart from all the other nations. And it is these distinguishing criteria, the dietary laws (and circumcision), that were done away with. Christianity's intuition was correct: *Israel's restrictive diet is a daily reminder to be apart from the nations.*⁵²

On the other hand, Milgrom says that the most basic ethical foundation of the dietary system, the prohibition of blood, is intended to be universally applicable: "in effect, Israelite and non-Israelite are equated. Jew and non-Jew are bound by a single prohibition, to abstain from blood."⁵³ Certainly this seems to be the view of James' Jewish Christian faction at the Apostolic Council in Acts 15:20, 29. Secondly, meals became an important means for intra-Jewish group distinctions, especially in the Second Temple Period. Jewish sectarian movements in the Greco-Roman period distinguished themselves from one another by means of their distinctive meal practices.⁵⁴ Also, diet served to distinguish different classes of Jews from one another, for example: priests from ordinary Israelites in the Biblical period; *talmidei-hakhamim* from *ammei ha-aretz* (torah scholars from Jews who didn't engage in torah study) in the rabbinic period; kabbalists who understand the esoteric mystery of the Biblical sacrifices and eating from Jews who didn't in the medieval period.⁵⁵ Perhaps it is this thesis, that meals function to differentiate

⁵¹ Baruch A. Levine, "Excursus 2: The Meaning of the Dietary Laws," *The JPS Torah Commentary: Leviticus* (Philadelphia/New York/Jerusalem: Jewish Publication Society, 1989) p.244.

⁵² Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16* (The Anchor Bible; New York, et al.: Doubleday, 1991) p.726.

⁵³ Milgrom, *Leviticus*, p.713.

⁵⁴ Gillian Feeley-Harnik, *The Lord's Table: Eucharist and Passover in Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1981) p.?.; G. Theissen; M. Borg.

⁵⁵ Brumberg-Kraus, "Meat-Eating and Jewish Identity," where I trace the Biblical antecedents and post-Biblical interpretations of the rabbinic baraita: "Rabbi said, it is forbidden for an *am ha-aretz* to eat meat - as it is written, 'This is the torah of beast and fowl' (Lev 11:46) - for all who engage in Torah - it is permitted to eat the flesh of beast and fowl. But for all who do not engage in Torah, it is not permitted to eat beast and fowl." (*b.Pesahim* 49b)

both competing Jewish groups from one another and Jews from Gentiles, that is the most immediately applicable to our work as a research group on meals in the Greco-Roman world.

Jewish meal practices tend to be less ascetic than Christian and other Greco-Roman philosophical groups.

In a joint session of the “Hinduisms” and “Judaisms” Consultation and the Asceticism Group at the AAR meeting in 1996, we participants were invited to “problematize” the notion of asceticism from our particular fields of expertise. I took up this challenge and raised two questions: one regarding definitions of asceticism and the other, the role of scriptural conceptions of “sacrifice”. First, are Jewish dietary rules, as self-conscious restrictions of all possible edible things to only those which are “clean,” tithed, dedicated or not dedicated to priests, correctly slaughtered, and properly preceded and followed by blessings, etc., *per se* forms of asceticism? Or must they be integrated with a dualistic philosophical perspective that dichotomizes “material” vs. “spiritual” to be “ascetic”? Secondly, to what extent do the Biblical priestly traditions of sacrifice shape the mythic function of this sort of “domestic asceticism” in other words, make it “less” ascetic? I think there is an “ascetical tension” in medieval kabbalistic interpretations of eating that is inseparably connected to a theurgical understanding of sacrifice as “cosmos regeneration”. Just as the Biblical priests acted as sort of “surrogate stomachs” for God - consuming the bounty of the earth on the altar fires so as to send its “essence” back up to the Creator as “a pleasing fragrance” - *reakh nikhoakh*, so some 13th century kabbalists, such as R. Bahya ben Asher, transferred this same role (by way of rabbinic and mystical interpretations of the Temple sacrificial system) to the Torah scholar and his table. The metaphor of the Biblical sacrifices in which elite Jewish eaters must consume food to send it back up to God seems to push one to eat, rather than to abstain from eating, if one is to give God God’s due. An empty

oven can't cook anything. This idea of eating is later developed in Hasidic thought as one of the principle means of “*avodah be-gashmiyut*” (service of God through the physical body).⁵⁶ In addition, the joy one is supposed to experience from celebrating the festivals commanded by God is specifically associated with the eating of meat and the drinking of wine, though as the Talmud puts it, “when the Temple existed there was no rejoicing except with meat...but now that the Temple no longer exists, there is no rejoicing except with wine.”⁵⁷ Is this asceticism? But compare this to the ecstatic rejoicing of Therapeutae at their meatless and wine-less meals that Philo praises in his treatise *On the Contemplative Life*. Is the absence of sacrificial language plus Philo's philosophical preference for Platonic mind-body dualism what makes this description of a Jewish meal diverge from what seems to be the general non-ascetic tendency of Jewish meals?

There's a tension between vegetarianism and meat-eating in Jewish meals

Finally, Jewish scholarship is calling increasing attention to the tension between vegetarianism and meat-eating in Jewish meals. It has become a commonplace to recognize that the Bible originally prescribed a vegetarian diet (Gen 1:29-30: “See I have given you every plant yielding seed...to everything that has the breath of life I have given every green plant for food.” Later, after the Flood God concedes to humanity the permission to eat meat (Gen 9:3: “Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you; and just as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything.”), provided that they observe the prohibition against eating blood. So, Genesis 9:4: “You must not however eat flesh with its life-blood in it. Both B. Levine and J. Milgrom emphasize that the blood prohibition in Leviticus' dietary laws are reminders that meat-eating is

⁵⁶ Louis Jacobs, “Eating as an Act of Worship in Hasidic Thought,” *Studies in Jewish Religious and Intellectual History: In Honour of Alexander Altmann on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday* (ed. Siegfried Stein and Raphael Loewe; London: Institute of Jewish Studies/ University of Alabama Press, 1977).

⁵⁷ B.Pesahim 109a.

a departure from the original Edenic vegetarian ideal.⁵⁸ Gary Rendsburg, in the paper he read at the Klutznick-Harris Symposium on Food and Judaism, “The Vegetarian Ideal in the Bible,” suggests that the Bible sets forth this ideal in three stages. In the beginning, God permitted only a vegetarian diet to human beings and animals. Even the animals were not to be carnivorous. Then in the second stage after the flood, God conceded that human beings might eat meat. When the priestly dietary rules of Leviticus further limited the meat Israelites may consume, they excluded carnivorous or predatory animals, in order to drive home the ethical lesson that we should neither spill life blood ourselves, nor eat animals that do. In the third messianic age, the point of Isaiah's vision, 11:6-9: “The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid...the cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox” is that even the carnivores will stop eating other animals. No one, neither human beings nor beasts will need to shed blood to eat. I too gave a paper at that conference that presented classic post-Biblical Jewish arguments both for meat-eating and for vegetarianism. I concluded that that the positions co-exist in tension with one another in Jewish tradition. I also think that meat-eating plays an important role in reinforcing hierarchal social roles in Jewish society (rational, imaginative humans over brute animals; men over women, torah scholars over *ammei ha-aretz* - “ignoramuses”), and privileging ethnic/kinship ties over ties based on shared faith or shared charismatic experiences.⁵⁹ In other words, Jewish groups bound by blood eat meat together; early Christian groups desiring to break down ethnic barriers between Jews and Gentiles did so at a communion meal of wine and bread. Shared meat was conspicuously absent.

⁵⁸ E.g., Leviticus 17:14: "For the life of all flesh -- its blood is its life. Therefore I say to the Israelite people: You shall not partake of the blood of any flesh, for the life of all flesh is its blood. Anyone who partakes of it shall be cut off."

⁵⁹ Brumberg-Kraus, “Meat-Eating and Jewish Identity,” p.?.; “Not by Bread Alone,”p.?

Suggestions for Further Research

Having set before you these eight theses about meals in Jewish Studies, I can see more clearly what's missing. I suggest three directions for further study. First, it's clear that I've omitted discussion of certain genres of literature connected with meals that should not be neglected for a full picture. The *Derekh Eretz* literature, so-called minor tractates of the Talmud like *Derekh Eretz Rabba* and *Derekh Eretz Zuta*, though probably written down in the period of the Babylonian Amoraim, contain much material on meal etiquette that is strikingly similar in form to the lists of rules for Hellenistic associations. Daniel Sperber has done a great service to make critical editions and commentaries of these works available in both English and Hebrew, and explicitly invites classicists and medievalist to consider the relevance of this literature to their studies.⁶⁰ He says,

Our material also opens up new avenues of study, posing a number of interesting questions, such as the relationship between Rabbinic Wisdom literature and that of the Ancient Near East in general, and more specifically of the biblical and “intertestamental periods, Rabbinic etiquette and the customs of the Qumran community.”⁶¹

Another promising area of study would be stories about meals, meal scenes, or chriae with meal settings imbedded in talmudic narratives or legal discussions. Finally, there is an extensive critical discussion of “medicine in the Talmud” that is full of material about nutritional and dietary practices, but which is rarely mentioned in any of the Jewish studies scholarship on meals.⁶² Though much of this scholarship pays little attention to the rules of critical scholarship of rabbinic literature current in our circles, it does focus attention on subject matter quite relevant

⁶⁰ Daniel Sperber, *A Commentary On Derech Erez Zuta* (Ramat-Gan, Israel: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1990) p.9; *Masekhet Derekh Erets Zuta* (Yerushalayim: Tsur-Ot, 1982).

⁶¹ Daniel Sperber, *A Commentary On Derech Erez Zuta*, p.9.

⁶² E.g., *Julius Preuss' Biblical And Talmudic Medicine* (translated and edited by Fred Rosner; New York: Sanhedrin Press, 1978; Fred Rosner, *Medicine In The Bible And The Talmud: Selections From Classical Jewish Sources* (New York: KTAV House, 1977); Irene and Walter Jacob, eds., *The Healing Past: Pharmaceuticals In The Biblical And Rabbinic World* (Leiden; New York: E.J. Brill, 1993).

to the study of Jewish meals.⁶³ Indeed, I would like to see the contemporary wholistic approaches of David Kraemer and Jeffrey Rubenstein vis á vis the rhetoric of talmudic sugyas and talmudic stories applied to these “medical” texts assembled by Fred Rosner and others, to get a better understanding of rabbinic views about diet.⁶⁴

A second major lacuna in my survey is the topic of Jewish meals and gender. Two questions are particularly important in this regard. First, are Jewish meals gendered? Obviously, yes, but a lot of work still needs to be done to spell out exactly how gender roles play a part in ancient Jewish meals. Athalya Brenner’s re-reading of food imagery in the Song of Songs is a great start in this direction. She points out that despite expectations to the contrary (Song of Songs seems to be one of the more egalitarian Biblical representations of male/female relations), in the famous food metaphors, the woman is nearly always the meal, the male the consumer.⁶⁵ Also, meals often function as a sort of weapon that women use to entrap or do away with hostile men in Biblical and post-Biblical literature (e.g., Yael, Esther, Judith). Is that significant? Nancy Jay’s important study of the role of gender and sacrifice is certainly relevant to Jewish meals that often performed or described as sacrifices or quasi-sacrifices. Jay argues that animal sacrifice “identifies, legitimates, and maintains enduring structures of intergenerational continuity between males that transcend their absolute dependence on women’s reproductive powers.”⁶⁶ Or as she wittily put it, sacrifice is a “remedy for man having been born of women.”⁶⁷

⁶³ This is also true of one of the few book-length “social histories” of Jewish food from the Biblical era to the present, John Cooper, *Eat And Be Satisfied: A Social History Of Jewish Food* (Northvale, N.J. : Jason Aronson, 1993).

⁶⁴ David Kraemer, *Reading The Rabbis: The Talmud As Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); Jeffrey L. Rubenstein, *Talmudic Stories: Narrative Art, Composition, And Culture* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999).

⁶⁵ Athalya Brenner, “The Food of Love: Gendered Food and Food Imagery in the Song of Songs,” *Semeia 86: Food and Drink in the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament* (ed. by Athalya Brenner and Jan Willem van Henten; 1999) pp.101-112,

⁶⁶ Nancy Jay, *Throughout Your Generations Forever*, xxvii.; cf. Brumberg-Kraus, “Meat-Eating and Jewish Identity,” pp.?

Study of gender roles in Jewish meals needs to carefully lay out the different activities involved in a Jewish meal: production of food, acquisition of food, preparation of food, and consumption, as Ruth Magder Abusch argued in her paper for the Klutznick-Harris Symposium, "Kashrut: Women as Gatekeepers of Jewish Identity." Where are men and women in this process? How does their position on this chain of production to consumption affect their relative control of the process? The second main question that must be addressed is: are Jewish critical studies of meals themselves gendered?! The textual bias of my survey at this point seems pretty obvious, and reinforces an observation that several of us made at the Klutznick-Harris Symposium on Food and Judaism: male scholars seemed to focus on *texts* about meals, while the female scholars focused on the actual "performance" of meals.⁶⁸ Men presented views of food in classical Jewish texts, while most of the modern historical and ethnographic presentations of Jewish food were by women. Whether this gender gap was accidental or endemic to Jewish studies, it did reinforce an overall "disconnect" between scholarship that focused on texts, and scholarship that focused on the performance or realia of Jewish meals.

This brings me to my third desideratum. Because of this "disconnect" we need to see more studies that self-consciously integrate texts, practice, and realia of meals. Two studies of medieval food practices set the standard for this sort of integration of textual, anthropological, and sociological analysis: Caroline Walker Bynum's *Holy Feast, Holy Fast* and Ivan Marcus's *The Rituals of Childhood*.⁶⁹ Recognizing my own shortcomings in this regard – yes, I am a text man – I am particularly excited about the prospects working collegially with our multi-

⁶⁷ Jay, *Throughout Your Generations Forever*, xxiii.

⁶⁸ See <http://puffin.creighton.edu/klutznick/Klutznick2002.htm> for a schedule of speakers and topics to judge for yourself if this is the pattern.

⁶⁹ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley, CA: University of California, 1987); Ivan G. Marcus, *The Rituals of Childhood* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996).

disciplinary group to advance our understanding of meals in the Greco-Roman period. Perhaps it's out of this strong desire to link texts to practice that I have characterized my own kosher corner of Greco-Roman meals as midrash. When meal texts and meal experiences are linked, then meals are a sort of midrash. Thus, I take issue with Joseph Tabory when he says (in regard to R. Gamaliel's injunction to "say" the Passover foods), "in our context, the important point to notice is that this ideological exposition is not an exposition of a biblical text but of the food brought to the table."⁷⁰ On the contrary, the experience of performing Jewish meal rituals *is* an exposition of the Biblical text, at least implicitly. Eating meals can be ritualized performances of texts like "YHWH 'passed over'..." and "they embittered our lives..." - ritualized Biblical metaphors – in short, "lived midrash."

⁷⁰ Tabory, "Towards a History of the Paschal Meal," p. 69.