Dissertation #6

Title: **Gemüseanbau und Gewächse in Palästina zur Zeit der Mischnah** (Vegetables and Vegetable Cultivation in Palestine in the Mishnaic Period)

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Summary

Executive Summary: The dissertation can be classified as belonging to the area of, i.a., Oriental Studies, Land of Israel Studies, Jewish (cultural) history, history of agriculture or history of food. The author, a graduate of the liberal-oriented Berlin Hochschule / Lehranstalt, intends to give an overview on the cultivation and consumption of vegetables in the Levant during the Mishnaic period mainly based on information contained in classical rabbinic literature, these primary sources being supplemented by a plethora of additional literature, including on modern botanics. It is possible to subdivide the work into two halves: the first half offers a systematic-topical treatment of issues related to the subject (in practice, often resembling a somewhat disorganized compilation), while the second half consists of a glossary of the Hebrew / Aramaic terms for vegetables, giving a referenced translation and further details for each plant.

Preface (pp. 5 - 7)

In the preface, the author presents the object of the dissertation: assembling all available information from classical rabbinic literature on the growing of vegetables and their utilization in, what the author calls, Palestine during the first two centuries CE. Afterwards, the used sources are specified in much detail: works of classical rabbinic literature (Tannaitic strata), medieval talmudic commentaries, Greco-Roman agricultural writings, then-contemporary textbooks on agriculture / olericulture and on the geography of the Levant, and Jewish Studies literature. The author mentions also, without giving further details, a study trip to Uppsala (almost certainly, to the local university's botanical garden) that provided him with further knowledge of medical plants.

I. Introduction: Vegetables in the Bible (pp. 8 - 10)

When specifically dealing with agriculture in Palestine, the Bible does not elaborate on the cultivation of vegetable plants, so the author. However, in the Pentateuch, various plant species common in Egypt (like melons or onion), and herbs are mentioned. Other books of the Hebrew Bible, as demonstrated by the author, mention additional sorts (e. g., cucumber) and contain a small amount of information on some of the employed methods for growing, harvesting and cooking vegetables (e.g., a passage in the Book of Isaiah is quoted that shows that dill was threshed with a light stick).

II. The Cultivation of Vegetables (pp. 10 – 25)

Note: The dissertation is characterized by excessive referencing with the footnotes usually taking up more space than the text itself. In the following summary, the information contained in the notes will be included as much as possible.

1. The Notion of Vegetables According to the Mishnah (pp. 10 - 12)

This section deals with explaining the Mishnaic demarcation between grains, fruit of trees and fruits of the land (the preferred Mishnaic term for vegetables), focusing especially on the difference between the two latter categories: the Mishnah defines tree fruits, so the author, as growing from the trunk of a tree and not directly sprouting from roots; as a secondary criterion, after the harvesting of fruits, as opposed to vegetables, a tree or trunk should remain that can yield further produce later on. This is followed by an overview of the various Hebrew terms for vegetables. The notes provide sourcing for the author's claims, as well as etymologies, information on Halakhic implications and a then-contemporary definition of vegetables according to the science of botanics.

2. Geographic Issues (pp. 12-3)

Here, the different growing areas of vegetable plants in Palestine are named, both for Mishnaic times and for the time of the dissertation's creation. The abundance of vegetable sorts mentioned in the Mishnah and in the New Testament is seen by the author as evidence for the suitability of the soil of Palestine for olericulture.

3. Gardens and Fields (pp. 14 - 16)

Based above all on references to the Babylonian Talmud, this section contains miscellaneous information on cultivated areas covering topics such as terminology (including etymology), location, structure, differences between various types of fields, surveillance of crops against damage done by animals and against thieves.

4. Cultivation of the land (pp. 16-8)

This section focuses on the techniques and tools used in olericulture (e.g. providing information on ancient irrigation techniques).

5. Growth of the Seeds (pp. 18 - 21)

Here, details are given regarding the growth process (timing of the sowing, growth periods, weed and weed control, the religious prohibition against mixing seeds etc.).

6. Parts of the Plants (21 - 23)

In this section, the terms for plant parts known in rabbinic literature (such as roots, leaves…) are given in both German and Hebrew / Aramaic.

7. Harvest (pp. 23 - 25)

The timing and the process of harvesting vegetables are described, this is followed by information on postharvest procedures such as cleaning (especially for religious reasons to prevent contamination by insects) and storing.

III. The Consumption and Utilization of Vegetables (pp. 25 – 38)

1. Utilizing the Parts of Plants (pp. 25 - 27)

Various ways of consuming vegetables (e.g. in a raw form, or after cleaning and grinding, like beans) or utilizing them in a non-food way (e.g. hollowed out pumpkins as buckets or radish oil that was also used for oil lamps).

2. Preservation (pp. 27 - 28)

This section shows some of the preservation techniques used by the Jews in antiquity, such as pickling of herbs or storing onion-like plants in humid places.

3. Vegetables as traded goods on the market (p. 29)

A section with (few) miscellaneous details about the marketing of vegetables (such as the fact that an official called *agorademon* was tasked with policing the market).

4. Vegetables as Food and the Status of a Vegetarian Diet (pp. 29 - 32)

Here, the author explains that while a main dish made up of vegetables was common among the poor, for the rich vegetables served only as a side dish or as appetizers, referring to Talmudic sources and quoting also very extensively from Greco-Roman sources (like Plinius, Martial, Horace). In addition, information is provided on Mishnaic rules for the charitable distribution of vegetables and on other Halakhic details.

5. Preparation (pp. 32 - 35)

Many preparation methods and dishes attested in rabbinic literature or in medieval commentaries (such as by Maimonides) are presented in this section. For example, the author mentions a vegetable soup as a common dish or the fact that vegetables were often, according to Talmudic sources, a part of fish recipes.

6. Medicinal plants (pp. 35 - 38)

In the last section of this part, the author lists much information contained in Talmudic sources on the medical use of vegetables and herbs in Tannaitic times. For example, it is mentioned that to stop the bleeding after a circumcision procedure, pulverized cummin was rubbed into the wound or that garlic was known to have many medical applications, among others, as a disinfectant or as an aphrodisiac.

<u>IV. The Vegetable Plants / V. Glossary</u> (pp. 38 - 71)

This part consists of 92 numerated entries in an encyclopedic overview of vegetables and “adjacent plants” (pp. 59ff) according to their Hebrew names (Aramaic names are sometimes given in parentheses) in alphabetical order. This is followed by a short visual dictionary (pp. 63 - 67), containing pictures of eight of the plants and of their parts labelled in Hebrew, and by an index (pp. 69 - 71).

Here, by way of example three of the entries of the encyclopedic part shall be translated to illustrate the method:

p. 45: “ No. 16. חלביצין: Shev. [Sheviit] 7, 2 - Ber. [Ovadia of Bertinoro] defines this as the root of ornithogalum, according to Mai. [Maimonides] this is an unknown herb, maybe common comfrey or milkweed, Syr. [Syriac] ܚܠܒܢܐ; J. [the Jerusalem Talmud] explains this as ביצו נץ חלב, roots of the נץ חלב. Similar to this is חלבציון (L. [Löw, likely referring to the work by Immanuel Löw “The Flora of the Jews”] II 52) in T. [Tosefta] 77, 24, stands together with שלשישית (a misspelling of לשישית), see also b. [Babylonian Talmud] Nidda 62a.”

p. 50: “ No. 35. לפסן, Kilayim 1, 5, according to Sammter [] this is white horehound, gr. λαμψάνη. L. [Löw, likely referring to the work by Immanuel Löw “The Flora of the Jews”]. Ber. [Ovadia of Bertinoro] cites with regard to this passage the [Shulchan] Aruch מרויו בלע”ז. Mai. [Maimonides] says: its taste is equal to לפת and it grows to a height of one ell [cubit]. The physicians call it לפסין.”

p. 61: “No. 17. . פרג ,פרגין Millet [Note: in modern Hebrew millet is דוחן, so this may be a mistake on the part of the author.] [Tractate] Challah 1, 4. Sheviit 2, 7. Syr. [Syriac] ܦܪܓܐ. [Shulchan] Aruch says with regard to the latter passage, cited by R.S. [Shimshon ben Avraham]: It, i.e. the “פ, looks like a full pomegranate. Mai [Maimonides] says on this passage: פרגין means שבאיש in Arabic, with regard to the passage in Challah he uses the word כשבאש. Ber. [Ovadia of Bertinoro] mentions the same word and translates it בלע”ז פפוואר. In Sifra § 110, millet is counted among the produces allowed on Passover, because its dough remains unleavened.”