מיטש לש מימה לעו זונגע י"ש לצא תוינבגע תליכא לע :זוזמ תלערה ינוכיס / Risks of ingestion: On eating tomatoes in Agnon, and on the water of Shittim

Author(s): Ephraim Nissan and זסינ מירפא

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Risks of ingestion: On eating tomatoes in Agnon, and on the water of Shittim

Ephraim Nissan

1. Introduction

1.1. Risk avoidance: rational vs. irrational (from a *Whiggish* viewpoint)

Fearing the risks of ingestion may be quite rational. The Jewish Sages of antiquity were afraid enough of poisonous mushrooms, to forbid all mushrooms "because of the mortal danger" (*Tosefta, Terumot,* 7:16):

פִּטְרִיּוֹת אֲסוּרוֹת מִפְּנֵי סַכָּנַת נְפָשׁוֹת

Mushrooms are forbidden because of danger to life

At most, we may disagree by considering this an overly precautious attitude, yet we are likely to be willing to concede that if it was expected that there wasn't enough widespread knowledge, in society at large, of the criteria for telling apart good mushrooms from bad mushrooms, the aversion to risk was quite rational, and the attitude of the Sages was a responsible one. In gentile society, this kind of attitude is found at present, concerning the poisonous *fugu* fish from Japan (which is not *kosher*, even regardless of its poison): it takes a

skilled cook to remove the poison. And how willing one should reasonably be to run the risk that the dish is poisonous?

Yet, other examples of aversion to the ingestion of what is edible exist, which, on the basis of the laws of *kashrut* alone, would be permissible – examples that allow us to consider the aversion as irrational (even if we subscribe to the proper rules of *kashrut*). Such a smug modern attitude ranks of what historians of science term (disparagingly) a *Whiggish* attitude, and *Whiggery*. 'Whiggish' denotes a present-minded attitude towards the development of science, "a tendency to judge all past scientific activities by standards set by currently prevailing theories" (Stachel 1987, p. 60).

That attitude is not necessarily overt, or conscious. Nor is *Whiggish* editing of historical texts of science always wrong:

> "The scientist, active or retired, is likely to be impatient with what seem to be distractions or digressions on the progress towards truth, or anyway towards the present. And when reading a text of past science, he may well be most interested in what 'really happened', if some experiment or observation is in question, or how it can be set out in modern notation if it is a description in natural history or a piece of mathematics [...] To write a modern chemical reaction for a nineteenth-century chemical test, or a genetic analysis of some work on selective breeding, is a dangerous business; well done, it may illuminate the text, but it can just be confusing" (Knight 1987, p. 5).

1.2. Early and mid modern, vs. late antique and medieval: Two temporal anchors, for two examples of sorry effects being ascribed to ingestion

In this article, we are going to address two examples of such aversion: one is documented from the middle modern period for Habsburgic

Galicia. The second one – developed in part 3 of this article – will deal with late antique and medieval fear of ingestion.

Interestingly, Shmuel Yosef Agnon chose to raise the subject in an episode set in Wilhelmine Germany. According to Agnon, observant Jews from Galicia used to avoid tomatoes, because the conduit for the spread of tomatoes in Galicia was administrated by the Catholic clergy that had imported tomatoes plants from Rome. We argue here that one must also pay attention to early modern lore concerning the supposedly aphrodisiac properties of tomatoes – reflected in some obsolete European names for 'tomato' – but which is not always reported in early modern European herbals.

1.3. Edible staples originating in the New World: On a fundamental difference between animal and vegetable products

For bird kinds (we use 'kind' rather than 'species', to avoid confusion with Linnaean taxa), and according to some rabbinic authorities, also for mammals, a tradition is required, in order for the given kind to be deemed *kosher*. A major example of this rule being circumvented is the turkey, a bird from the Americas. There was a major debate in the early modern period concerning this bird being or not being *kosher*. The quite influential Shelah (i.e. Rabbi Isaiah ben Abraham ha-Levi Horowitz, Prague, 1565? – Tiberiad, 1630) proscribed eating turkey to his offspring, until the coming of Elijah in messianic times would clarify whether the turkey is permissible or not.

Yet, eventually the turkey came to be uncontroversially accepted as being kosher, and apparently one factor that contributed to acceptance was the misconception that this bird originated in Asia (and that there was a tradition for eating it), rather than the Americas (thus, a continuous tradition being impossible).

As to the Muscovy duck, whose *kosher* status was controversial in the 19th and 20th centuries, we can see how the formation of new folklore

intruded: among Jewish agricultural settlers in Argentinean colonies whose population was entirely Jewish, some maintained that the Muscovy duck mates with snakes. Zohar Amar and his joint authors have discussed these matters in various articles, whose revised Hebrew versions were eventually collected in Amar (2004). In English, both the turkey and the Muscovy duck were discussed in Amar and Zivotofsky (2003).

With plants, it was a different story. *Halakhic* discussions concerning plants are found, in relation to ritual requirements (e.g., which plants qualify as *maror,* "bitter herbs", for Passover). A New World plant, the tobacco, became the object of discussions concerning the prohibition of smoking on Shabbat. Yet, issues of whether a given plant kind is fit for Jewish consumption are of an altogether nature, *vis-à-vis* animal kinds.

Both the potato and the tomato were imported from the New World. They were eventually recognised to be edible and became important staples in Europe, the Near East, and elsewhere. How they acquired that status among Jews is not something that can be taken for granted by mere inclusion of Jewries in their respective host societies. Providing a general survey of the documentary evidence concerning those vegetables is outside of the scope of this article; we will use mentions from the writings of Agnon as our starting point.

2. On one kind of Jewish attitude in early and middle modernity: Vegetables from New World, and different Jewish receptions

2.1. Cues for temporal positioning: Potatoes and quills, vs. tomatoes as an indicator of cultural geography

Shmuel Yosef Agnon is known by the acronym of his Hebrew initials as Shai Agnon. Samuel Josef Czaczkes was born in Buczacz, Galicia, in 1888, and died in Jerusalem in 1970. He won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1966. Agnon lived in Germany in between 1913 to 1924,

and in Palestine both before (1907-1913) and afterwards. Agnon's own biographical circumstances, of being a Galician who lived in Germany for several years, are reflected in the circumstances of the Jewish characters from the episode about tomatoes we are going to concern ourselves with, in Section 2.2 below.

An anecdote about Rabbi Tzvi Elimelech of Dinov is related in Agnon's story *The Ink and the Feathers*[1] in which Agnon refers to somebody intending to buy potatoes, yet being given ink and feathers instead. Agnon inserts two remarks, to the effect that at the time of the events related, Jews were already eating potatoes, and that in that same generation, people were still using quills in order to write.

Nissan (2009c) is concerned with how to infer dating for the narrated time in another work by Agnon, *The Bridal Canopy* (Agnon 1931). The main cues are from the life chronology of such rabbis who are mentioned as being alive. In the present paper, instead, we are concerned with the significance of tomatoes not for cultural time, but rather for cultural space: the narrated time of *Mr. Lublin's Shop* is in the early 1920s, the place being Leipzig under the Weimar Republic, whereas embedded narratives (pervasive especially in that work by Agnon) are from the Wilhelmine Germany (1888–1918) (if indeed the locale may be Germany).

2.2. Mistrust of tomatoes, and Arno Lublin's explanation for it

The significance of Agnon mentioning tomatoes, *vis-à-vis* East European Jewish dislike for that kind of vegetables, was once pointed out by linguist Avshalom Kor in an Israeli TV broadcast. Agnon himself is quite explicit about that traditional attitude.

In his shorter novel *In Mr. Lublin's Shop,* Agnon has a Jewish couple in pre-WWI Germany eat a salad with tomatoes.[2] The episode takes place on the day that Galician Jew Arno Lublin, a wealthy shopkeeper in Leipzig, has been unofficially informed that at the long last, he has

been naturalised German. His German-born wife, who, on marrying him became like him an Austrian subject, can therefore recover her German citizenship. Mr. Lublin doesn't tell his wife as yet, as he prefers to wait until he is officially notified. At home on that day, he watches dinner being served: "Placed on the table, there are three or four kinds of bread, and butter, and a few kinds of cheese, and sardines, and a vegetables salad, and every dish was placed in a separate vessel". He notices that bread and butter is placed on flat pieces of wood that do not come from his shop. He resists the urge to quip to his wife that she has brought home merchandise of his competitors. He realises that what is a joke (חידוד) to Galicians, is not necessarily such to Germans, and may even be offensive (דברי חידודין).

> נעץ את המזלג בסלט ואכל מן העגבניות. אכל ואמר, מיום שבאתי לגרמניא לא אכלתי עגבניות טובות שכמותן. ראה שהיא תמיהה. חזר ואמר אם אמרתי מיום שבאתי לגרמניא לא אכלתי עגבניות שכאלה צריך אני לומר לך, קודם שבאתי לגרמניא לא ידעתי טעם עגבניות, שבעירי שלי לא אכלו היהודים עגבניות, שהיו קוראים לעגבניות תפוחי טריפה, מפני שגדלים בגניהם של הכמרים, שכשהלכו הכמרים לרומי הביאו משם עגבניות וגידלו אותן בגניהם, לכן מנעו עצמם היהודים מאכילת עגבניות.

> He stuck a fork into the salad, and eat something of the tomatoes. As he ate, he said: "Since when I came to Germany, I never ate so good tomatoes". He saw she was puzzled. He repeated and added: "If I told you that since I came to Germany, I hadn't eaten such tomatoes, I must tell you, that before I came to Germany, I didn't know the taste of tomatoes, as in my town the Jews wouldn't eat tomatoes, as they called tomatoes 'unkosher apples', because they were cultivated in the gardens of priests. When the priests went to Rome, they brought back from there tomatoes and cultivated them in their gardens, and this is why the Jews avoided eating tomatoes".

The narrated time is ca. 1900, perhaps a little earlier. In fact, on the next day of the episode above, the greengrocer, a widow, on being congratulated by Mrs. Lublin, tells her her own sad story. Afterwards Mr. Lublin offers a clerical job to the greengrocer's unemployed soon-to-become son-in-law., A little girl is born to that man and the greengrocer's daughter (both are gentile actors who were sacked). Mr. Lublin is acquainted with the same girl when she is a young sportswoman who socialises in a Jewish milieu.

2.3. An alternative aetiology, and early terminology

Arguably, tomatoes making their appearance in Eastern Europe, or perhaps in specific towns of Galicia, through the conduit of clergymen (wheather monastic horticulture or rather just priests who after a pilgrimage to Rome, brought back tomatoes and planted them in their gardens), wasn't the only reason for the resolve, among devout East European Jews, to look askance at the *pommes d'amour*. European folklore associated with some older names for 'tomato' has very likely contributed to forge this attitude. The libidinous proclivity tomatos may supposedly develop in their eaters was a likely concomitant reason for that fear - which was not found among 19th century Levantine Jews, judging from the traditional place of tomatoes in their respective cuisines. The fear of the supposed erotic features of tomatoes would have stemmed from the literal sense of early modern European names for 'tomato'.

By semantic calque, that etymology is also reflected in the Modern Hebrew name for 'tomato', *'agvaniyyá* (from the same lexical root as a verb for 'to lust after' and the modern name for 'syphilis'). As Sivan (1970/1) explained, the Hebrew word *'agvaniyyá* for 'tomato' was coined by Jechiel Mikhel Pines in 1886, in a passage he translated from a German book on the agriculture of Syria and Palestine. Chapter 27 was titled "Der Liebes oder Paradiesapfel", i.e., "The Tomato", literally "The Apple of Love or of Paradise". The translated

text appeared in *HaZevi,* the weekly of Eliezer Ben Yehuda, who at home avoided the neologism *'agvaniyyá.* Some other Hebrew-speaking Jews, in Palestine, also initially disliked the term *'agvaniyyá.*

Eliezer Ben-Yehuda, instead, used to send his kin to the market, to ask for *baddurót,* while buying tomatoes. Ben-Yehuda's own coinage for 'tomato', *baddurá,* was obtained by adapting (by assimilating the *n* into a doubled *d* as middle radical) the spoken Arabic word *bandúra* 'tomato'. *Bandura* is an Arabic word itself originating by adaptation of a European term, in all likelihood Italian *pomodoro* (literally, 'golden fruit'); cf. Neapolitan *pummarola,* obsolete French *pomme d'amour.* Russian, too, got its name for 'tomato' from its Italian name: it is помидор (*pamidór*), but this is from the now substandard plural form *pomidoro* in Italian (from *pomi d'oro*); the current standard Italian plural form is *pomodori.*

In Iraqi Arabic, the usual name for 'tomato' is *ṭaṃáṭa* instead, with all three consonants velarised (*bandura* also occurs among Iraqi Muslims, but not in the local Judaeo-Arabic vernacular); cf. French *tomate,* Spanish and Portuguese *tomate,* English *tomato,* German *Tomate,* Dutch *tomaat,* the latter stressed on its first syllable. Whereas in Turkish, the name is *domates,* in Modern Greek as spoken it is ντομάτα (pronounced *domáta*), but in the Modern Greek kathareusa (the purist, now obsolete literary language), χρυσοῦν μῆλον, literally 'golden apple', which in Modern Hebrew motivated the name for 'orange' instead, and confusingly, also did in kathareusa (χρυσόμηλον), even though people just say πορτοκάλι, whence spoken Arabic *purtqál* (regional Italian, too, has *portogallo* for *arancia*).

2.4. Early nomenclature yet not the associated ascribed properties, in Gerard's *Herball*

English botanical terminology was enriched by John Gerrard or Gerard's *Herball,* first published in 1597.[3] This plant's "faire and goodly apples" are "of a bright shining red colour, and the bignesse of a goose egge or a large pippin", but Gerard also reports handling a variety whose fruits were yellow. "Apples of Love grow in Spaine, Italie, and such hot Coutries, from whence my selfe have received seeds for my garden, where they doe increase and prosper". As far as eating is concerned:

> In Spaine and those hot Regions they use to eate the Apples prepared and boiled with pepper, salt, and oyle: but they yeeld very little nourishment to the body, and the same naught and corrupt.
>
> Likewise they doe eate the Apples with oile, vinegre and pepper mixed together for sauce to their meat, even as we in these cold countries doe Mustard.

Gerard was of the opinion that tomatoes are a "cold" rather than "hot" food:

> The Golden Apple, with the whole herbe it selfe is cold, yet not fully so cold as Mandrake, after the opinion of *Dodonæus.* But in my judgement it is very cold, yea perhaps in the highest degree of coldnesse: my reason is, because I have in the hottest time of Summer cut away the superfluous branches from the mother root, and cast them awat carelesly in the allies of my Garden, the which (notwithstanding the extreme heate of the Sun, the hardnesse of the trodden allies, and at that time when no rain at all did fal) have growne as fresh where I cast them, as before I did cut them off; which argueth the great coldnesse contained therein. True it is, that it doth argue also a great moisture wherewith the plant is

> possessed, but as I have said, not without great cold, which I leave to every mans censure.

For our own present purposes, it should be noted that also the mandrake is considered by the same author to be cold, yet the mandrake is a plant famously associated with sexuality. Gerard's use of the attribute 'cold' is not in contradiction with any such effect, even though he mentions none for tomatoes. Gerard disbelieved lore about how dangerous it is to remove the root of the mandrake (he dealt with that in his entry for 'Peionie', *ibid.,* p. 67). Gerard also listed a few names for 'tomato':

> The Apple of Love is called in Latine *Pomum Aureum, Poma Amoris,* and *Lycopersicum:* of some, *Glaucium:* in English, Apples of love, and Golden Apples: in French, *Pommes d'amours.* Howbeit there be other golden Apples whereofs the Poëts doe fable, growing in the Gardens of the daughters of *Hesperus,* which a Dragon was appointed to keepe, who, as they fable, was killed by *Hercules.*

The name *Lycopersicum* literally means 'wolf's peach'. At any rate, Gerard did not elaborate about why the tomato should be called 'Apple of Love'. The worst he has to say about eating tomatoes, is that "they yeeld very little nourishment to the body, and the same naught and corrupt".

2.5. How current understanding of lead poisoning has affected the early modern ascription of toxicity to tomatoes

Tomatoes, potatoes, and eggplants belong to Solanaceae. Some species of Solanaceae are toxic indeed, even domestic potatoes that have started to grow roots. That is to say - it is a condition of the product, rather than the foodstuff itself, that is associated to some extent with the feature of being toxic.

Solanin is a mix of toxic alcaloids which are found sometimes in potatoes and tomatoes. It stands to reason that the spread of innocuous cultivated varieties (cultivars) of tomatoes and potatoes was made possible precisely by breeders selecting such varieties that were harmless. It may also be that early exposure to varieties that weren't harmless, caused early modern Europe to develop lore about potatoes being toxic (eventually dispelled by Parmentier), and about tomatoes being toxic.

Potatoes would grow even if left above ground, but it is usual practice to plant them under a small mound, or at the very least to earth up the potato as it starts to grow above ground. This is done in order to block out the sunlight, as it can cause the growing potatoes to turn green. Once they are green, they become poisonous. Not only sunshine, but also too high or too low temperatures develop toxicity, as alcaloids concentrate near the surface of potatoes. It is quite possible that potatoes had a reputation of being poisonous even before Parmentier convinced farmers to grow them, as sometimes they had been eaten when poisonous — which they can still become, but is carefully avoided by proper cultivation and appropriate distribution to consumers.

When it comes to the ascription of toxicity to tomatoes in early modern Western Europe (in general society, not specifically among Jews), the focus is, in some present-day understanding, on how food was served, rather than on tomatoes themselves. It has been suggested that it was the early modern spread of pewter dishes that was to blame for the spread of the belief about tomatoes being poisonous. Acidity in foods would have caused pewter dishes to release lead, thus leading to lead poisoning, and tomatoes do release acid fluids indeed. One can even come across such a claim in a local newspaper, in a history and local history column (Ogley 2009, p. 25):

> Those with money had plates made of pewter. Food with high acid content caused some of the lead to leach into food,

> causing lead poisoning and death. This happened mostly with tomatoes so for the next 400 years or so tomatoes were considered poisonous.

This hypothesis is a convenient aetiology conditioned by the awareness of lead poisoning that has emerged in the second half of the 20th century, but it is a hypothesis that comes with weaknesses. Namely, lead poisoning is a slow process. Moreover, other foods are acid, too, and acid foods in general did not earn a stigma for being poisonous. It is difficult to see how early modern Europeans who were using pewter dishes without being aware of the risks involved because of potential lead poisoning, would have established a causal link with tomatoes of all acid foods.

It is important to realise that the hypothesis was only made possible by the state of knowledge that became available and widespread in the second half of the 20th century. In an article in the history of medicine, Elizabeth Fee has written (Fee 1990, pp. 591–592):

> All public health and housing personnel in Baltimore were urged to pay close attention to the lead paint threat; the Health Commissioner's new slogan: 'No Baltimore Child Should Die of Lead Poisoning,' was constantly repeated in mass media advertising, radio health broadcasts, newspapers, and pamphlets. In 1958, despite — or perhaps because of — the publicity, reported cases of child lead poisoning reached a record high of 133 cases and ten reported [p. 592:] deaths. This was more than twice the rate of 1957 or of any previous year. The increase in reporting led to even more publicity and to growing public concern. In a positive spiral of interest, increased reporting and increasing public concern in turn produced a political demand for more aggressive Health Department action. [...]

It is quite reasonable to assume that there was some lead poisoning resulting from the use of pewter in the early modern period (in use also among European Jews, and for that matter until a rather late period). It would be misleading to assume that tomatoes of all foods with acidity oozing from them, would be singled out for blame, or that the effects would be quick enough for ascription of toxicity to food based on what was in fact the outcome of lead being released from the pewter dishes.

3. Late antique and medieval fear of ingestion, and relation to place: Blaming ingestion in *Midrash*, and modern loss of the bad association

3.1. Ingestion supposedly implanting libidinous proclivity: A *midrashic* locus

The idea that food or drink, as well as environmental conditions, may encourage sin did not lessen liability to punishment. The drink may even be water with sorry organoleptic properties. At the very end of the Book of Joel, part of the medieval collectanea *Yalquṭ Shim'oni,* the verse "And a spring (*ma'ayan*) shall come forth from the House of the Lord and irrigate the cree of Shiṭṭim" (*Joel* 4:18) gets this aggadic commentary:

> There is a spring (*ma'ayan*) that raises strong people, and there is a spring that raises weak people, and there is such that it raises handsome ones, and there is such that it raises ungainly ones, and there is such that it raises modest ones, and there is such that it raises ones awash with lewdness, and the spring of Shiṭṭim was of fornication, and used to water the land of Sodom [...]. This is why they [i.e., the Children of Israel] misbehaved/were spoilt (*nitqalqelú*) at that spring, as it says (*Numbers* 25:1) "And Israel resided at Shiṭṭim" etc. [which is when the men sinned with the Moabitic women

> and adored Ba'al Pe'or], and the Holy One, blesséd be He, will cause it to dry up.

And this, on the evidence of the verse from *Joel* about the hydrographical change at Naḥal Shiṭṭim. An almost identical version of this passage is found in *Midrash Tanḥuma,* at the parashah *Balaq,* §17, and yet another, similar version, in *Numbers Rabbah,* at *Balaq,* §21 (with the homiletic etymology: "Shiṭṭim, because they did a *shṭut*", i.e., something stupid). The biblical commentary of Rabbenu Baḥye [ibn Paqudah], at *Balaq,* elaborates about the creek drying up, and then (as per *Joel*) being watered again. If it is watered again, one can infer that it dried up (unless, of course, it was a seasonal stream in the first place).

Whereas the place is mainly remembered because the men were snared, this having been devised by Balaam to bring about their fall, the same camping-ground was the last one before the crossing of the Jordan. When Moses died, the people still camped there, and it was from Shiṭṭim that Joshua (*Joshua* 2:1) sent the spies who eventually escaped from Jericho.

In an article about the beautiful captive woman in the Pentateuch's law of war, David Stern (1998) discusses an exegesis by Rabbi Akiba. He identifies one of the sources of inspiration of Rabbi Akiba's given passage as being the episode of Shiṭṭim – a passage from the tannaitic *Midrash* about *Numbers, Sifre Bammidbar,* 131.[4] Follows the translation of Rabbi Akiba's exegesis from Stern (*ibid.,* pp. 107-108) :

> They came and stayed at Shittim — in the place of shtupidity [*shtut,* literally folly, madness (i.e., idolatry)]. At that time the Ammonites and Moabites arose and built huts, from Beit Hayeshimot to Har Hasheleg, and they placed in them women selling all sorts of delicacies. The Israelites ate and drank. At that time a person would go out to stroll through the market, and he would wish to buy something for himself from an old

woman, and she would sell it to him for its price. A young girl would then call out to him, speaking from within [the hut]: Come here and buy it for less. And he would buy from the young girl one day, and then a second day. On the third day, she would say to him: Come inside and choose for yourself-aren't you already like a member of the family [*ben bayit*]? And he would enter her cubicle. Next to her the cooler was full of Ammonite wine-the law prohibiting Jews from drinking the wine of gentiles had not yet been promulgated-and she would say to him: Would you like to drink some wine? He would drink, and the wine would inflame him, and he would say to her: Give yourself to me [*hisham'i li*]. She would then take from under her breast-band an image of Peor, and say to him: My master, do you wish me to obey you? Then bow to this! And he would respond: How can I bow to an idol? And she would answer: What difference does it make to you? All you have to do is expose yourself to the idol! And he would expose himself to the idol. (From this case they said: a person who exposes himself to Baal Peor worships Baal Peor; a person who casts a stone at a *merculis* worships Mercury.) Then the wine would inflame him, and he would say to her: Give yourself to me. And she would say to him: Do you wish me to obey you? Then renounce the law [*torato*] of Moses. And he would renounce it, as it is said, "When they came to Baal Peor, they renounced [Him] for Shamefulness (i.e., idolatry); then they became detested as what they loved" (Hosea 9:10). And in the end, the [Ammonites and Moabites] made banquets for the [Israelites] and invited them to eat, as it is said, "they invited the people to the sacrifices for their god" (Numbers 25:2). (Sifre Bamidbar 131, Horovitz 1966 [1917]: 170–71)

Stern's article argues that *midrashic* narratives of seduction have something in common with, and possibly derived inspiration from, the

Graeco-Roman genre of the romance novel. Stern (*ibid.*, p. 108), remarks:

> This passage offers a vivid description of the process of seduction by which the daughters of Moab enticed the Israelite men; indeed, it is probably just this kind of seduction scene that lies behind Akiba's worst fears. But this narrative elaborating on the Numbers verses doesn't so much answer the question as to where Akiba derived his narrative as it simply forces us to reask the question, Where did the anonymous author of this passage from Sifre Bamidbar derive his narrative of seduction? Although in hindsight it may look like a reasonable extrapolation from the verses in Numbers 25, it is certainly not explicit in the Bible; further, as Martin Braun first noted, it seems itself to be a narrative composed under the influence of the romance novel (1938: 102-4). In fact, there is nothing in the Bible quite like either Sifre Bamidbar's or Akiba's narratives, at least none that contains all three elements of a cunning and seductive female, idolatry, and the seduction of the innocent Jewish male. Biblical narratives that possess one or two of these elements invariably lack the others.

We should consider again Stern's rendering of the *midrashic* pun on *shṭut* and *Shiṭṭim* as "in the place of shtupidity". In Nissan (2009d, 2009e), are discussed at length Hebrew "etymythological" puns on place-names.

3.2. The botanical rather than the *midrashic* association of the "bad" place, providing motivation for evocative modern toponomastics

Some maintain that the place as meant in *Joel* is not the same as the one in Transjordan. Actually, the literal sense is 'acacias'. To say it with Ewing (n.d.):

> In Joel 3:18 we read of the valley of Shittim which is to be watered by a fountain coming forth of the house of the Lord. It must therefore be sought on the West of the Jordan. The waters from the Jerusalem district are carried to the Dead Sea down the Wady which continues the Brook Kidron: Wady en-Nar. The acacia is found plentifully in the lower reaches of this valley, which may possibly be intended by the prophet.

Contrast this to Moses' and Joshua's Shiṭṭim, also called *Abel-Shiṭṭim* (*Numbers* 33:49). Again, we quote from Ewing:

> Josephus places the camp 'near Jordan where the city Abila now stands, a place full of palm trees' (Ant., IV, viii, 1). Eusebius' Onomasticon says Shittim was near to Mt. Peor (Fogor). It may possibly be identical with Khirbet el-Kefrain, about 6 miles South of the Jordan, on the lip of Wady Seiseban, where there are many acacias.

The botanical etymon also motivated the present-day Shiṭṭim, in Israel, being established far away from either location. At present, Shiṭṭim is an observation point (*mitzpé*) in the Negev 11 km south of the Tziḥór crossroads, in the southern Aravah valley, west of the border with Jordan. The place was so named after the acacia trees that grow in the area. The position identifier is 151 954 on 1:250,000 maps of Israel, i.e., longitude 151 and latitude 954. For comparison, the plain of Sodom is between 187 042 and 192 042, Jericho is at 193 140, and Beer-Sheva is at 130 072[5].

In Israel, *Naḥ"al* is how acronymously the rural branch of the army is called: the *No'ar Ḥalutzí Loḥem*, the Fighting Pioneering Youth. Rural settlements of such conscripts are also called *Naḥ"al,* followed with some other name. Punning on *Naḥal Shiṭṭim* (the biblical one), there is a military rural settlement, *Naḥ"al Shiṭṭim*, established in 1984, in the southern Aravah, ca. 13 km south of the Tziḥór

crossroads. It is south of Naḥal (Wadi) Ḥayyon, and north of the Plain of Ḥayyon. It stands to reason that modern Hebrew toponomastics (whose bestowing on the Negev was massive) selected the name Shiṭṭim not only for the acacias, but also because it occurs in the Bible as some place in the desert. Interestingly, the forbidding tradition about the place supposedly engendering lewdness, was no deterrent; for that matter, even homiletic exegesis does concede that once the creek dried up, it lost its ascribed fearsome qualities (which now we would term neuropsychic and physiovegetative).

3.3. Other examples of negative toponyms from the Negev

Zuckermann (2007) has discussed factors involved when the Israeli Hebrew toponomastics for the Negev region was established. The Negev toponym discussed in our article were not treated in Z,uckermann, yet, he too, pointed out the avoidance of negative associations:

> Of the 537 neologisms suggested by the Committee, 175 were phonetic matches, 167 literal translations and 124 ancient Hebrew toponyms linked to the present sites. The remaining 71 included other kinds of neologization such as euphemistic enantiosemic translation [i.e., reversal]. For example, the semantically positive Hebrew-descent toponym en yáhav, lit. 'The Spring of Hope', replaced the semantically negative Arabic toponym √ajn alwabá/, lit. 'The Spring of Plague'. Similarly, the Arabic toponym bi:r ħíndis 'The Well of Darkness' was translated as beér orá 'The Well of Light'. However, the initial name for this place — coined by the soldiers of the Israeli Army Engineering Corps who stayed there while building the road to Eilat in 1949-50 — was beér handasá, lit. 'The Well of (the) Engineering (Corps)', a phonetic matching of the Arabic bi:r ħíndis.

Still, it is necessary to distinguish between the deliberate avoidance of a negative association of which one is aware, an avoidance that may be expressed through reversal (which is the case of the two places Zuckermann is referring to), and merely unacknowledged negative association, that may have been motivated by either unawareness, or the resolve to behave as though it wasn't there in the cultural heritage.

In the case of the Arabic *'Ayn Waba* being made into the Hebrew *'Ein Yahav,* one could perhaps usefully bear in mind the *midrashic* tale about the textual locus *et-Vahev [Waheb] be-sufa* in *Numbers* 21:14. The aggadic *Midrash* claims that two lepers, Eth and Heb, were walking outside the Hebrew camp (precisely because they were lepers), when they saw the Emorite warriors preparing an ambush, sitting in caverns in the perpendicular stone walls of a pass in Transjordan. But a miracle happened, and the vertical wall of the mountain in front leaned to meet the wall with the caverns, and protuberances from the second wall penetrated the caverns, reducing the Emorite warriors to mash. The lepers went back to the Hebrew camp and related what they saw.

Although not a "nice" tale, it is tantalising that *Waheb* of the Pentateuch, which presumably is a cognate of *Yaheb* ('giving', cf. *Wahab* and *Hadi* as being divine epithets, inside the personal names 'Abd al-Wahab and 'Abd al-Hadi in Arabic) was made into none else than Heb, a leper character — albeit not so in Rashi's commentary to Numbers. Whereas Rashi did not know Arabic (his explanation of *Waheb* is grammatical, and he points out that this is equivalent to *Yaheb*), the late antique Jewish Sages who came up with that fable about the leper, may have known either Arabic, or some northern Arabian vernacular in which there was the noun *waba,* and so they made the connection.

Where the Bedouins recalled the plague (probably because of an actual epidemic that affected people gathered at the water pool), members of the committee perhaps, just perhaps, were reminded of

the story about the lepers Eth and Heb. But quite possibly, they were not. The story of Eth and Heb appears at the end of page 53a and the beginning of page 54b in tractate *Berakhot* of the Babylonian Talmud, which probably is the tractate that most people who study Gemara, study first. Thus, it is a relatively more accessed locus.

The role of the lepers giving a good announcement does not appear in the Torah, but in the story of the Kingdom of Israel in the Book of Kings (*2 Kings* 7:3) there is the story of the four lepers who find an enemy camp deserted, and give the announcement to the capital city that had been under siege. This is likely, I think, to have given rise to the role of good news coming from a leper, in the *Midrash* about the Arnon River, where the word *waheb* appears in Numbers.

4. Food in literature as being a domain within literary studies

4.1. An Overview

The Bridal Canopy is the obvious place, among Agnon's novels, where food and banquets feature prominently. When they do, the context is realistic (as opposed to, e.g., scenes with horses talking to each other). In that novel, whose frame story is set in Galicia in the 1820s, it even happens that an embedded story that climaxes at a banquet, was itself told during a banquet. One such episode motivates an anthropological analysis in Nissan and Amar (2008).

MacDonald (2008) examines food and its symbolism in the Hebrew Bible. Food in literature is itself a fairly popular area of investigation in literary studies. It is outside our scope to provide an extensive review of the subject. We will have to content ourselves with exemplifying, mentioning just a few works that analyse the role of food in the *belles lettres.*

Food in the European Romanticism is the subject of an award-winning book by Jocelyne Kolb (1995). Gastronomy in Molière comedies is the subject of Tobin (1990). Fitzpatrick (2007) relates food in

Shakeaspeare's plays to early modern dietaries. Lane (1995) is concerned with food in Jane Austen's novels. Alimentary symbolism in James Joyce's *Ulysses* was analysed by Tucker (1984). Schofield's (1989) *Cooking by the Book* is an edited volume on food in literature (and culture), whereas Wilkins' (1996) *Food in European Literature* is a booklet of just over sixty pages. Also consider Bevan's (1988) *Literary Gastronomy.*

Food in Literature was the title of a thematic issue of the journal *Romance Studies,* 13 (Winter 1988), with two essays appearing in the thematic section within *Food in Literature II and Varia,* this being no. 14 of that journal (Summer 1989) published by the Department of Romance Studies, University College of Swansea, Swansea, Wales, United Kingdom. For example, the two essays on food in Part II respectively are on food in Sartre's writings, and on food in the writings of Gide.

4.2. On the ingestion of insects with wine in Quevedo

Iffland (1982) is an edited volume for the quadricentennial of the birth of Quevedo – the major Spanish poet and prose writer Francisco Gómez de Quevedo y Villegas (1580-1645). In that volume, an essay by Maurice Molho analyses one of Quevedo's poems, and shows how pervaded it was with antisemitism (Molho 1982). Authors who referred to Molho's analysis include Ettinghausen (1987) and Fajardo (2002).

The longest essay in Iffland's volume, by Arnold Rothe (1982), "combs the complete works for references for eating, drinking, fasting, and defecation. In the tables which result, related terms (wine, Spaniards, men) are contrasted with their opposites (water, foreigners, women), and this constitutes 'a summa of prejudice' " (Smith 1984, p. 731). Rothe's data come from all genres, within Quevedo's texts.

Rothe's subject was further developed by Gardner (2006), but narrowing both scope and genre:

> "Even if we restrict ourselves to the topic of eating and drinking, no fewer than twenty-five poems addressing this theme have been noted by Arnold Rothe (pp. 114-116). Nevertheless, it may still be somewhat surprising to find numerous poems amidst his corpus that concern wine and mosquitoes" (*ibid.,* p. 11).

Gardner (2006) discusses texts in which a drinker ingurgitates insects with the wine, or in which the *mosquito* chooses to die inside the wine. In at least one point, Gardner explicitly identifies this *mosquito* with the insects so called in English, and that usually feed on blood, but this is not correct. Quevedo and others used *mosquito*, in the contexts we are considering, in its etymological sense 'little fly', and the insect denotes in context is *Drosophila.* Consider its Italian names: *mosca del vino* and *moscerino del vino,* its French names being *mouche du vinaigre* and *moucheron des caves.*

4.3. Rabelais, the eels, and Nabuzaradan

It is not always the case that food, when it appears in the *belles lettres,* does so in a realistic context. Cf. the essays in Westfahl et al. (1996), *Foods of the Gods: Eating and the Eaten in Fantasy and Science Fiction.* It was reviewed by Parkin-Speer (1997). Rabelais humorous writing is set in a fantastic storyworld, and food is pervasive. On an island, in ch. 39 of the *Quart Livre,* a conflict erupts, and an army of cooks massacres the army of the (anthropomorphised) eels (*Andouilles*). Admittedly, Rabelais got the idea of making the cooks into soldiers, and their leader into a military commander, from the Bible. This is based on the misinterpretation of the Hebrew compound *sar-hattabbaḥim* as 'the chief of the cooks', rather than 'the chief of the fighters (massacrers)'. Frère Ian (Brother Ian) tells Pantagruel:

> Pourquoy Potiphar maistre queux des cuisines de Pharaon, celluy qui achapta Ioseph, & lequel Ioseph eust faict coqu, s'il eust voulu, feut maistre de la cavallerie de tout le royaulme d'Aegypte? Pourquoy Nabuzardan maistre cuisinier du Roy Nabugodonosor feut entre tous aultres capitaines esleu pour assieger & ruiner Hierusalem?
>
> [How come that Potiphar, the senior cook of Pharaoh's kitchens, the one who beought Joseph, who would have made him a cuckold, had he wished so, was the commander of the cavalry of the entire Kingdom of Egypt? How come that it was Nebuzaradan, the senior cook of King Nebuchadnezzar, who was selected from amid all other commanders, for besiging and destroying Jerusalem?]

The cooks attack the eels (ch. 41) while shouting three times "Nabuzardan! Nabuzardan! Nabuzardan!", and it has been claimed — by Dorothy Parker (1971) in *The Musical Quarterly,* noting also that this follows another repetition ("Yours, yours, yours, we are all yours"), and that in his Five Books, "many scenes with their witty repartee could serve almost unchanged as playscripts") — that here we have the origins of the French vaudeville.

Katia Campbell (1991) has inferred, by the not as skillful use of Hebrew words in the Fifth Book (whose authorship is disputed), that unlike the first Four Books, it wasn't written by Rabelais. Her own paper builds upon the discussion of Hebrew in Rabelais in a *pataphysicien* article (*Pataphysique* 1950). She returned to the Hebrew of Rabelais in Campbell (1992).

4.4. On desire as being an effect of food in magic realism

In Nissan's 'An Insidious Rose' (2009a), in folklore studies, the Schmidt-Kahle Arab Version of the tale of the Death of Moses, in which Moses is made to unwittingly smell a deadly rose, is contrasted

to an episode from the fall of the Parthenopaean Republic during the Napoleonic Wars, when a trick involving a rose was played on Jacobin prisoners. Other relevant instances of lethal flowers or plants are discussed in a sequel article, Nissan (2009b).

The story *The Trail of Your Blood in the Snow* by Gabriel García Márquez is an example of how being pricked by the thorns of a rose results in death. In India, it was adapted into a play directed by Roshan, Roshan's *Taking on Modern Icons.* By contrast, being pricked by the thorns of a rose occurs in the plot of Laura Esquivel's magic realist novel (and film screenplay) *Like Water for Chocolate,* yet the effect is not death, but rather the arousal of desire in the participants to a banquet. Tita, the protagonist, has been doomed by her mother to never marry. Pedro, her suitor, is convinced to marry Rosaura, one of her sisters, instead.

The film's "characters experience life so intensely that they sometimes literally smolder", says film critic Janet Maslin (1993):

> In one of the film's most wildly imaginative episodes, Tita pricks her fingers on thorns and thus turns a meal of quails cooked in rose-petal sauce into the pure physical embodiment of her desire for Pedro. At this point in the story, food is described as "voluptuously, ardently fragrant and utterly sensual", and ordinary nourishment is truly beside the point. The effects of this dish are so potent that Gertrudis (Claudette Maille), Tita's other sister, feels her temperature rise and rushes to an outdoor shower to cool off. The dinner has so overheated Gertrudis that her body actually gives off smoke. Then the boards surrounding the shower catch fire and Gertrudis is carried off naked by one of Pancho Villa's soldiers, who has also fallen under the quail-and-rose-petal spell.

Roses have been known to be a potent ingredient in love philters since antiquity, yet the kind of effects that Esquivel contrives is something different: it is not the rose petals *per se* that cause the effects described, but rather Tita's sorrow and desire that are infused in the dish she cooks.

5. The theme of food in Agnon's writings, as treated in literary studies

Michal Arbel discussed food in Agnon in her *Written on the Dog's Skin* (Arbel 2006). In particular, she discussed food while interpreting Agnon's stories *Mazal Dagim* (pp. 138-139), *Giv'at ha-Ḥol* (pp. 193-194), and Agnon's novel *Tmol Shilshom* (*The Bridal Canopy*) (pp. 213-214). Arbel's treatment (in chapter 6) of the subject of Agnon's *Giv'at ha-Ḥol* repeats some ideas from a chapter in Nurit Guvrin's *Dvash Mi-Sela'* (Guvrin 1989). Gershon Shaked devoted an essay to food in Agnon's *Sippur Pashut* (Shaked 1973). Somebody also mentioned that Baruch Kurzweil had discussed food in Agnon somewhere in his own *opus,* but I cannot point out where more precisely.

In Nitza Ben-Dov's book *Vehi Tehillatekha* (והיא תהילתֶך), comprising chapters about the works of Agnon, Yehoshua, and Oz (Ben-Dov 2006), food is discussed in the chapters about Agnon's novel *Shirah,* as well as in the chapter about the long novella *Kissuy ha-Dam.* We should bear in mind that in the latter, the vegetarian Agnon provides a chilling description of working conditions in a basement *abattoir* of chicken. Agnon's vegetarianism is the subject of Rinah Lee's book *Agnon Ve-ha-tsimḥonut* (1994); her book discusses literary works by Agnon from the viewpoint of vegetarianism.

Let us consider in detail which passages in Nitza Ben-Dov's book about Agnon's fiction, *Unhappy / Unapproved Loves* (אהבות לא מאושרות), discuss food in specific passages from Agnon's works. In

ch. 1 sec. 7 (pp. 33-36) on Agnon's *'Ad Henna*, Ben-Dov analyses an episode, set in Germany during WWI, in which the protagonist, who is the narrator, has paid a visit to a cousin of his, Malka, whose husband and son are away, as soldiers. When the protagonist leaves, Malka in haste gives him as a present the raw liver of a goose. Yet, he is a vegetarian from Eretz-Israel, not unlike Agnon himself. Malka only had two geese, of which one had been stolen. She was keeping the second goose for her husband and son, once they would return, but now she has quickly slaughtered it for the sake of this cousin. There isn't time for her to roast the liver, and the narrator, who feels unable to refuse the gift, takes away the liver, drenched in blood, even though he is not going to eat it. He is always hungry (cf. Ben-Dov's discussion on pp. 109-110), yet he does not eat meat, and he does away with the useless liver.

In ch. 2 (p. 55), Ben-Dov contrasts what Agnon says about an architect he dislikes, in *'Ad Henna,* vs. the fragment *Mesha' Melekh Mo'av.* In the latter, Agnon's narrator relates that before WWI, he befriended that architect, as every day they would meet each other at a restaurant for vegetarians, then would leave together. By contrast, in *'Ad Henna* the narrator denies knowing the architect he dislikes, even though there clearly is a parallel between the two literary texts. Ben-Dov (p. 56) discusses this discrepancy.

On pp. 73-75, Ben-Dov discusses the nightly encounter between the narrator of *'Ad Henna* and a sculptor (and formerly, a shepherd) called Druzi (the narrator wonders whether he is Jewish, or "a Syrian or a Lebanese": yet, the narrator is not mentioning that he could be a Druze from Mt. Carmel). Druzi is among a group of people from Eretz-Israel whom the narrator has been following as they intend to go to a bakery and eat brerad while it is still warm. This is not to be: none of the group is going to reach the bakery, and their hunger for its bread remains unsatisfied. Druzi convinces the narrator to follow him to his studio, in order to have him "taste" an esthetic experience, but

this, too, is not to be: the narrator finds himself in the sculptor's studio, but what the sculptor wants is for the narrator to introduce him to a certain lady. At that point, the sculptor offers the narrator a drink, so they would toast to that lady.

Actually, references to food within the literary analysis also occur elsewhere in Ben-Dov (1997), as can be seen from the thematic index (s.vv. vegetarianism: pp. 34-37, 56, 388; meat eating and attraction to the flesh: pp. 37-38; hunger: pp. 109-110, 116; hunger for food as symbol for erotic deprivation: pp. 33–34, 35-36; meals that do not materialise: pp. 26, 29-30, 35, 73; cakes or sweets: pp. 241-246, 260, 402-403; salt: pp. 331, 408; goose liver: pp. 34-37, 109, 403).

I am grateful to Profs. Hillel Weiss and Nitza Ben-Dov for advice concerning the published scholarly record about food in Agnon.

6. Concluding remarks

That it is fruitful to discuss material culture in Agnon's texts, has been argued elsewhere. The present article grew up as part of a project on food in Agnon. Another outcome is Nissan and Amar (2008), on eating *tsvi* in a novel by Agnon (he meant roe deer), and that article in turn is related to Amar and Nissan (2008), on the raising and eating of gazelles by Jews in recent generations.

In this article, we have started by discussing taxonomy of food avoidance, then turned to a passage from Agnon's fiction. It describes a middle-class Jewish couple dining at home in Wilhelmine Germany, in Leipzig. The wife is local, whereas the husband is a Galician. Having eaten tomatoes, he explains to his wife that his community of origin avoided eating tomatoes, as these were associated with the clergy.

In the early modern period, toxicity was ascribed to tomatoes, just as it was to potatoes, by an opinion that is known to us from gentile cultures. We mentioned a current hypothesis that ascribes the wrong

belief about tomatoes being toxic to the early modern spread of pewter, and to lead poisoning. We pointed out what makes this hypothesis unconvincing.

We suggested that a likely aetiology for avoidance, of the kind reported by Agnon as being widespread specifically among Galician Jews even as late as around the year 1900, may have concomitantly been early modern lore about tomatoes, as reflected in older names for them. Fear of ingestion causing sexual awakening would have motivated avoidance among East European Jews. Of such avoidance there is no evidence among Near Eastern Jews, ~~instead~~. Feeding cheese to Sisera or Holophernes has on occasion been traditionally interpreted as being an aphrodisiac. Unwittingly ingesting stuff with such properties is not unknown: of a unit of the French Legion in the Amaghreb, it was related that several soldiers ended up in hospital after eating frogs in the French fashion, only those batrachians were from a local, toxic species with aphrodisiac effects.

Yet, in Jewish tradition there is a textual *locus classicus* about libidinous proclivity arising as a pattern *en masse* from ingestion, and that *midrashic* topos is associated with a "bad" place: the one where the Children of Israel went astray after the Midianite women, committing both fornication and idolatry. The *midrashic* topos about ingestion has ramifications for other biblical *loci* where the toponym *Shittim* occurs. We have provided a discussion of this, and have remarked about how the bestowing of modern toponomastics in the Negev, partly based on biblical precedent but not necessarily on the same spot, was not deterred by the forbidding notoriety of the biblical *Shittim*.

We then referred to a sample from Zuckermann's discussion of Negev modern toponomastics, such that a negative name was made into a good name, somewhat in the manner of the ancient Romans renaming Maleventum *Beneventum* because of a local victory, or of the Cape of Storm being renamed *Cape of Good Hope* in the early modern period.

We also devoted a section to food in literature as being a domain within literary studies, and we made a few examples there, that are of interest to Jewish studies.

NOTES:

[1] הדיו והנוצות, pp. 154-155 in the 2001 edition of his 1984 posthumous book *Takhrikh shel Sippurim,* תכריך של סיפורים.
[2] The novel itself was first published as such in 1974, having been edited by Agnon's daughter, Emuna Yaron. The episode with which we are concerned is found in Section 6 of Chapter 1 (on p. 21 in Schoken's 2001 edition). Chapter 1 was first published in the literary supplement of *Haaretz* on the eve of Passover in 1964.
[3] There is a chapter for 'Apples of Love' in the 1943 edition, pp. 189-191.
[4] The brackets are Stern's, and so is the spelling 'shtupidity', which tries to render a Hebrew pun about the place-name.
[5] *Kol Maqom ve-Attar* 1998, 13th ed., s.vv. and in maps.

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