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The Fifth Passover Cup and Magical Pairs: Isaac Baer Levinsohn and the Babylonian Talmud

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Abstract

The Fifth Passover Cup is mentioned in a textual variant of a *baraita* in Tractate Pesahim of the Babylonian Talmud (118a), attributed to Rabbi Ṭarfon and another anonymous Palestinian *tanna*. Scholars have demonstrated that the variant is primary in talmudic manuscripts and among the Babylonian Geonim. Following a nineteenth-century proposition of Isaac Baer Levinsohn, it is argued that the fifth cup was instituted in Babylonia due to concern for magical evil spirits aroused by even-numbered events [*zugot*]. Objections to Levinsohn's theory can be allayed by critical source analysis: the Talmud's attribution of the fifth cup to the Palestinian *tanna* Rabbi Ṭarfon in a *baraita* is pseudoepigraphic, based upon Rabbi Ṭarfon's teaching regarding the recitation of Hallel ha-Gadol in Mishnah Ta'anit 3:9. A special appendix is devoted to Levinsohn's separate study on *zugot* in the ancient and medieval world.

Keywords

Talmud – Passover – magic – Haskalah – source criticism – Halakhah – Levinsohn – magical pairs

1 Introduction¹

If the four Passover cups were created during the six days of creation, then the fifth was conjured up at twilight on the eve of the Sabbath.² The saga of the mysterious fifth cup stretches from its origins in a phantom talmudic textual variant to its alleged metamorphosis into the ubiquitous “cup of Elijah” to latter-day messianic revival attempts incorporating the visual arts. This study focuses on the genesis of the fifth cup attested to in the Babylonian Talmud. Modern critical methods empower the reviving of a forgotten nineteenth-century interpretation linking the fifth cup directly to the talmudic context in which it is first mentioned: demonology and magical pairs [*zugot*]. It also enables a novel explanation for the inclusion of *Hallel ha-Gadol* at the end of the Passover Haggadah, one never previously articulated in either Rabbinic or scholarly literature, and with strong claims to historical accuracy.

Before discussing the fifth cup, a description of the four basic Passover cups is in order. The Passover eve feast falls on 15 Nissan, the first month of Spring. When the ancient Temple still stood in Jerusalem, Jews gathered there in great numbers to offer and consume the Passover sacrifice.

After the destruction of the Temple, a commemorative familial feast in the Jewish home was instituted in its place, adapting the structure of the traditional sacrificial service and its consumption accompanied by the singing of the *Hallel* (Pss 113–118) to the contemporary Roman choreographed ritual feast, whose participants typically reclined and interspersed entertainments with cups of wine. Commonly referred to as the *Seder*, meaning “the order,” ritual consumption of unleavened bread, bitter herbs and other foods are followed by a homiletic account of the exodus from Egypt in the *Haggadah*, the feast, and blessings. Drinking four cups of wine at mandated segments of the *Seder* is obligatory, as emphasized in m. Pesahim 10:1. Several explanations for the precise number of the four cups are found in the Palestinian Talmud. According to the great Palestinian talmudic sage, Rabbi Yoḥanan (ben Nappah, c. 180–c. 279 CE), the Passover cups correspond to four biblical expressions of

1 I thank Eliezer Brodt, David Henshke, Jordan Penkower and Jonatan Meir for their input and scholarship. All errors are mine alone. I acknowledge the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture for gracious sponsorship during the year I began this research and to ReiRes (Research Infrastructure on Religious Studies) for helping to enable its completion. Many thanks to Jean and Tania Guetta for their continued support of Jewish studies.

2 According to m. Avot 5:6, b. Pesahim 54a, and *Pirque de-Rabbi Eliezer* 19, objects with metaphysical properties were created at twilight on the eve of the first Sabbath at the close of the six days of creation.

redemption: “I brought you out,” “I saved you,” “I redeemed you,” and “I took you in.”³ These are found in verses recited within the Passover Haggadah (Exod 6:6–7):

לְכוּ, אָמַר לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: אֲנִי ה' וְהוֹצֵאתִי אֶתְכֶם מִתַּחַת סְבִלֹת מִצְרַיִם, וְהִצַּלְתִּי אֶתְכֶם מֵעַבְדֹתֵם, וְנָאֵלְתִי אֶתְכֶם בְּזֵרוּעַ נְטוּיָהּ וּבְשַׁפְטִים גְּדֹלִים. וְלִקַּחְתִּי אֶתְכֶם לִי לְעָם וְהִיִּיתִי לְכֶם לֵאלֹהִים, וַיִּדְעֻתֶם כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם הַמּוֹצִיא אֶתְכֶם מִתַּחַת סְבִלֹת מִצְרַיִם.

A fifth expression of redemption, “I brought you to the land,” is found in the following verse (Exod 6:8):

וְהִבֵּאתִי אֶתְכֶם אֶל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁאַתִּי אֶת יְדֵי לְתַת אֶתָּה לְאַבְרָהָם לְיִצְחָק וּלְיַעֲקֹב וְנִתַּתִּי אֶתָּה לְכֶם מוֹרְשָׁה אֲנִי ה'.

This was interpreted by later medieval sources as the basis for drinking a fifth cup of wine. The original source of the interpretation is unclear; *Orhot Hayyim* cites R. Abraham ben David of Posquieres (Rabad), who cites it in the name of the Palestinian Talmud, but that passage is not attested to elsewhere. R. Abraham ben David of Posquieres (Rabad), who cites it in the name of a nonexistent passage of the Palestinian Talmud, but that passage is not attested to elsewhere. Several other interpretations were also offered during the Middle Ages, but by the modern period this became the dominant scriptural explanation for the fifth cup.⁴ These interpreters employed the verses to explain a practice first documented in an opinion cited in the Babylonian Talmud that proscribes drinking a fifth cup of wine at the *Seder* and reciting additional Psalms over it as well. The opinion is attributed to Rabbi Tarfon and another anonymous *tanna* (Palestinian sage from the period of and following the destruction of the Temple) in a *baraita* (a tannaitic tradition preserved orally “outside” of the Mishnaic corpus):⁵

תנו רבנן: חמישי אומר הלל הגדול, דברי רבי טרפון, ויש אומרים ה' רעי לא אחסר.

3 Lawrence Schiffman (ed.), *The Talmud in the Land of Israel: A Preliminary Translation and Explanation*, vol. 13, *Yerushalmi Pesahim*, trans. Baruch Bokser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 476–477; *Palestinian Talmud* (Venice: Bomberg, 1523), *Pesahim* 37b–c.

4 *Orhot Hayyim* (Florence, 1751), 79b; see Menachem M. Kasher, *Kos Hamishi* (New York: Schlesinger, 1950), 29.

5 B. *Pesahim* 118a. On the primacy of the textual variant “the fifth cup” over “the fourth cup” of the printed Talmud, see Menachem M. Kasher, *Israel Passover Haggadah* (New York: American Biblical Encyclopedia Society, 1950), 179–182; and David Henshke, *Mah Nishtannah: The Passover Night in the Sages' Discourse* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2016), 129–132 [Hebrew].

The principal collection of the teachings of the *tannaim* [*tanna*, plural] is found in the *Mishnah*, compiled around the second century CE. It forms the kernel of the Palestinian and Babylonian Talmuds, compiled mostly during the fifth–seventh centuries CE. Note that Rabbi Johanan’s rationale of the four expressions of redemption found in the Palestinian Talmud is not mentioned by the Babylonian Talmud at all. In the twentieth century, R. Menahem Kasher collected over 20 explanations for the four cups strewn across the Midrashic corpus.⁶ Recall that the fifth cup was first anchored upon a fifth expression of redemption, *v’heveti*, only in the Middle Ages. It was attributed to the Palestinian Talmud but that source is nonexistent and can effectively be considered a medieval midrash.⁷ So, it is distinctly possible that the opinion cited in the Babylonian Talmud had an entirely different rationale for proscribing the fifth cup.

Much scholarly ink has been spilled on the history of the four cups and their origin. The highlights of this vast scholarship are surveyed in a Hebrew book by David Henshke.⁸ Henshke’s contribution lies not only in the independent collection and organization of a vast body of sources and scholarship, but in their original critical synthesis and evaluation, and the novel interpretations offered. This study owes much to Henshke’s survey and pathway through the literature.

Henshke explains that the four cups were arrived at by starting with the standard two for *Qiddush* and *Birkat ha-Mazon*, and then adding one for the recitation of the *Haggadah*, and one for the recitation of *Hallel*.⁹ This interpretation is based upon a view expressed by the Tosafists, a prominent French medieval talmudic school whose “additions” adorn each printed talmudic page opposite those of Rashi. Each component of the Seder requires its own cup, and at the time of the institution of the four cups, no special importance was

6 Menachem M. Kasher, *Torah Shlemah* (New York: Shulsinger, 1944), vol. 9, 107–108. Kasher referred to “twenty” interpretations, proceeded to count twenty-one by number, and then threw in a couple more for good measure.

7 Henshke, *Mah Nishtannah*, 130n335, proposes that the source may be R. Moshe ha-Darshan.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid., 125–129. Institution of the fourth cup in order to accompany the *Hallel* in lieu of the Passover sacrifice was already proposed by Baruch Bokser, *The Origins of the Seder: The Passover Rite and Early Rabbinic Judaism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 63. If the *Haggadah* was not yet recited at the time of the institution of the four cups, the second cup corresponded to the Pascal sacrifice itself. The recitation of *Hallel ha-Gadol* was already explained to be reason for the institution of the fifth cup by Joshua Kulp, *The Schechter Haggadah* (Jerusalem: The Schechter Institute of Jewish Studies, 2009), 176, but no explanation was offered for the introduction of *Hallel ha-Gadol*, a problem Kulp noted explicitly on 271.

placed on the number four by the Sages. All that concerned them was that each component of the *Seder* should be accompanied by a cup of wine and there just happened to be four components. Only later would midrashic explanations of the significance of the number four appear. These were forthcoming in droves, beginning with the Palestinian Talmud.

This all relates to the obligatory four cups, but what about the fifth cup? Following this logic, why did some *tannaim* institute it? Henshke explains that the destruction of the Second Temple resulted in a necessity to institute an additional component of the Seder expressing the new situation of exile and spiritual depression, over and beyond the sections about redemption from Egypt. Rabbi Tarfon selected *Hallel ha-Gadol* (Psalm 136, by most opinions)¹⁰ and an anonymous *tanna* chose Psalm 23. These verses stress faith in God as a protector, inspiring loyalty to him in the darkness of the exile. Again here, the content and purpose of the recitation was of the essence and the additional cup accompanied it only to “make it official.” Henshke was preceded by R. Judah Loew b. Bezalel (*Maharal* of Prague, c. 1525–1609) in looking to the complementary recitations of the *tannaim* as a key to understanding the principle of the fifth cup. The Maharal emphasized the concept of *parnassah*, sustenance, which the Babylonian Talmud explains is why the Great Hallel, *Hallel ha-Gadol*, is bestowed with the appellation: “Great.”¹¹

Henshke’s explanation of the four cups is convincing. However, its application to the fifth cup requires some leaps of faith. Early sources do not link the liturgical additions to the vicissitudes of the Roman exile. If that was the central motivation for the institution of the fifth cup, one would expect some

10 Other opinions in the Babylonian Talmud include one or more previous chapters of Psalms. Bar Qapara in the Palestinian Talmud (Ta’anit 3:11, 67a) apparently understood that *Hallel ha-Gadol* referred to other chapters entirely, part of the beginning of the standard “Egyptian” Hallel, Ps 115–116. *Hallel ha-Gadol* is mentioned in m. Ta’anit, end of Chapter 3, and Tosefta, end of Chapter 2 (or 3, in the Erfurt manuscript). Some Mishnah texts also identify *Hallel ha-Gadol* as Ps 136, such as Tosefta and the Babylonian Talmud. R. Solomon Adeni, in *Melekheth Shlomo* (Yemen, 1567; Hebron, 1624), followed by J.N. Epstein, considered this text a later addition and not part of the original *Mishnah*. Joseph Tabory extends this logic to the Tosefta as well, but Henshke disagrees, perplexed as to why Epstein failed to point out that the insertion to the Mishnah came from Tosefta. See this scholarship and more summarized by Henshke, *Mah Nishtannah*, 133–138.

11 *Gevurot ha-Shem* (Krakow, 1582), ch. 65, 86b. The response is also found in the Palestinian Talmud Ta’anit, but the question is different: why is this verse appropriate to recite when rain falls on a fast day? The Maharal’s interpretation treats the response as if the Babylonian Talmud was asking a parallel question: why is this verse appropriate to recite on the fifth cup? I hope to publish an additional study on the Maharal’s interpretation of the fifth cup and its influence on nineteenth-century Polish Chassidism.

type of discussion regarding it, especially considering that the Sages were not in agreement concerning whether a fifth cup should be proscribed. One contemporary rabbinic author suggested the opposite, that the obligation of the fifth cup was demoted to optional status after the destruction of the temple.¹² The most commonly familiar medieval midrashic interpretation, that the “fifth expression of redemption,” *v’heveiti*, is the source, described above, compares favorably. In contrast, Henshke twists the Talmud inside out to explain the fifth cup as a mere formality piggybacking upon the important recitation, which was the real motivation of the sages. He effectively casts the supporting player, the recitation, in the main role and demotes the star, the fifth cup, to a mere enabler. With this twist, Henshke deviates from the medieval sages and from his primary conceptual source, the Maharal. Despite its brilliant talmudic turn-about, Henshke’s proposition is of limited historical value.

For comparison, a diametrically opposite approach was taken by Rabbenu David b. Reuven Bonfid (Catalonia, thirteenth century), a disciple of Nahmanides. According to R. David, Rabbi Tarfon did not initiate the fifth cup, but rather, he only voiced an opinion regarding which recitation is appropriate. The cup itself is primary, preceding R. Tarfon temporally, and the recitation is secondary. However, unlike Henshke, R. David offered no explanation for the institution of the fifth cup in the first place.

In my opinion, a more plausible alternative was provided by Isaac Baer Levinsohn (Kremenetz, Russia, 1788–1860)¹³ in his widely-read book dedicated to countering allegations of blood libel, *Sefer Efes Dammim*.¹⁴ Levinsohn was a towering figure of the Russian Haskalah. On the one hand, he was religiously observant and corresponded with great rabbinic leaders, such as R. David Luria. *Sefer Efes Dammim* was crowned with rabbinic approbations. On the other hand, Levinsohn was a free thinker, actively promoted secular studies and other reforms, and ridiculed the Hasidic movement, drawing the ire of the zealots, who attacked and repressed him. Due to the nature of the topic and importance of wide distribution to a non-Jewish audience, as well as continued

12 Rabbi Eliezer Melamed, *Laws of Pesah: English Edition* (Har Bracha: Yeshivat Har Bracha, 2013), 351. I would like to thank Elli Fischer for calling this source to my attention.

13 For another side of Levinsohn’s thought, see: Jonatan Meir, *Words of the Righteous: An Anti-Hasidic Satire by Joseph Perl and Isaac Baer Levinsohn* (Los Angeles: Cherub Press and The Center for Research on the History and Culture of Polish Jews, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2004) [Hebrew].

14 Isaac Baer Levinsohn, *Sefer Efes Dammim* (Vilna 1837, written in 1834); Louis Greenberg, *A Critical Investigation of the Works of Rabbi Isaac Baer Levinsohn* (New York: Bloch, 1930), especially 59–63. The publication of many of Levinsohn’s works were delayed due to a lack of funds.

blood libels in the years following publication, *Sefer Efes Dammim* was translated from Hebrew into many languages soon after its composition. Thus, we find a contemporary English translation published in 1840 in response to the Damascus blood libel.¹⁵ *Sefer Efes Dammim* is structured as a dialog between Simmias, a Patriarch of the Greek Orthodox Church, and a Rabbi Maimoon, who explains Jewish customs to him:

SIMMIAS: But what reason is there for calling this [fifth] glass or cup, “the cup of Elijah” and for filling it and putting it on the table?

MAIMOON: No reason is assigned by any of the modern Jewish authors, and of course none by the ancient authors, the custom being entirely unknown to them: but there is a certain passage in the Talmud which may be considered as an allusion to it. This passage says it is a holy precept to drink wine on that glorious night, and even the poorest must endeavour to do so; the four cups that we are required to drink are in commemoration of, and therefore correspond in number with, the four expressions or promises of redemption given in the Bible; *but as some persons who place faith in charms are afraid to drink an even number (although no danger of charms need be feared on this night, it being under the especial care of the Almighty), to satisfy the scruples of such, we drink an extra cup.* In the Talmud, all precepts concerning which there may be any doubt, are termed “Elijah” because the Lord said, by his prophet Malachi (Malachi, iv. 5, 6), “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord; and he shall turn the heart of the

15 J. B. [Isaac Baer] Levinsohn, *Efes Dammim: A Series of Conversations at Jerusalem between a Patriarch of the Greek Church and a Chief Rabbi of the Jews, Concerning the Malicious Charge against the Jews of Using Christian Blood*, trans. L. Loewe (London: Longman, Brown, Green & Longmans, 1841), 75–77. The volume was sponsored by Moses Montefiore. Jordan Penkower notes that Louis Loewe, the translator, served as Montefiore’s secretary, and accompanied him on many trips between 1839–1874. The exchange preceding the citation above is helpful for context, so I include it here: “SIMMIAS: Friend Maimoon, do not be angry. I have now to ask thee a question respecting another custom of the Israelites [...] thou knowest it is natural for man to seek for an exposition of that which appears strange to him. What is meant by that glass of wine called the “cup of Elijah?” Do you really believe that Elijah will come on that night and drink out of it? Then ye open for a moment the house door, saying, ‘Blessed may he be that cometh!’ Is not that a very foolish ceremony? MAIMOON: We open the door to remind those present that that night is called the watched night, or the night on which we were under the especial protection of the Almighty. But the most ignorant amongst our people have been seized by a foolish idea, and have imagined that Elijah would come indeed; and thus arose the saying, ‘Blessed be he that cometh!’ The truth is, the ceremony of filling the cup of Elijah was unknown to our earliest ancestors.”

fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers” by which we understand that the hearts will comprehend each other, and that Elijah will define and decide every doubtful point in the law, religious precepts, or customs. The cup we drink called the “cup of Elijah” was originally so termed by some religious Israelite, who, finding himself in some doubt in connection therewith, used that phrase in accordance with the instructions of the Talmud. May it be the will of the Almighty that that precious day may quickly arrive, when falsehood shall prevail no more, and truth, in all its transparent lustre, shall be established by the seal of the Creator.

Here, Levinsohn explained the talmudic innovation of the fifth cup as stemming from a magical concern for evil spirits [*maziqim*] aroused by even numbers, *zugot*. Recent scholarship by Gideon Bohak, Yuval Harari, and their colleagues and students documents the manifold impact of various forms of belief in magic upon the sages of the Babylonian Talmud.¹⁶ For example, incantations written on “magic bowls” serve as a primary window into actual early Aramaic texts composed in Babylon, similar to the talmudic texts themselves.¹⁷ Neither does the Babylonian Talmud discuss magic bowls nor do the bowls mention *zugot*. However, they are the focus of the talmudic discussion that branches out into demonology topics, with specific talmudic incantations paralleled in the bowls.¹⁸

16 See: Gideon Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011). *Zugot* are mentioned *en passant* in: Yuval Harari, *Jewish Magic before the Rise of Kabbalah*, trans. Batya Stein (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2017), 401. For context, see: Strahil V. Panayotov and Luděk Vacín, *Mesopotamian Medicine and Magic: Studies in Honor of Markham J. Geller* (Leiden: Brill, 2018); Blanca Villuendas Sabaté, *La Geomancia en los Manuscritos Judeo-Árabes de la Gueniza de el Cairo* (Córdoba: Oriens Academics, 2015). For modern critical commentary on other talmudic passages discussing demons, see Moshe Benovitz, *BT Berakhot Chapter I with Comprehensive Commentary* (Jerusalem: The Society for the Interpretation of the Talmud, 2006), 227–230.

17 See, for example: Siam Bhayro and Matthew Morgenstern, *Aramaic Magic Bowls in the Vorderasiatisches Museum in Berlin: Descriptive List and Edition of Selected Texts* (Leiden: Brill, 2018); Shaul Shaked et al., *Aramaic Bowl Spells: Jewish Babylonian Aramaic Bowls*, vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

18 However, for a possible talmudic reference to magic bowls, see: Sara Ronis, “Do Not Go Out Alone at Night:” *Law and Demonic Discourse in the Babylonian Talmud* (PhD diss., Yale University, New Haven, 2015), 163–164. For analysis of another conception of nature unique to the Babylonian Talmud, see Leor Jacobi, “Toxic Talons and Venomous Nails: The Impetus for Falconry and Its Imposition on Ancient Jewish Law,” in *Falconry in the Mediterranean Context*, New York University—Abu Dhabi, 15–17 November 2015, forthcoming conference volume.

Levinsohn's goal was refuting the blood libels, which was literally a matter of life and death. Gentiles associated the wine of the Passover feast with blood, and his task was to provide convincing explanations for its presence and harmlessness. Levinsohn followed the traditional explanation of the four cups as based upon the four expressions of redemption. It would have been logical for him to add the fifth cup in this manner, but since drinking the fifth cup was no longer customary, no explanation was necessary. Instead, he was charged with explaining the cup of Elijah and the belligerence of *shfokh hamatkha*, "pour your wrath on the gentiles." Hence, Levinsohn borrowed the talmudic conception of Elijah as a future arbiter of halakhic points of doubt and applied it to the fifth cup.

According to Levinsohn, the uncertainty of the fifth cup stems from a questionable belief that actions performed in even numbers attract evil spirits, referred to by the Babylonian Talmud as *zugot*.¹⁹ The locus of discussion of *zugot* is in the same chapter of the Babylonian Talmud where the fifth cup is mentioned (b. Pesahim 109–112). Various types of actions performed in pairs are discussed, with the Talmud dialectically exploring which pairs arouse evil spirits and which do not. One opinion in the Talmud goes so far as to advise against taking two wives for this reason, and if one has done so, to take a third.²⁰

Rabbi Tarfon and the anonymous *tanna* both shared a belief in the power of *zugot* and thus prescribed a fifth cup. The other sages may have accepted the principle of *zugot* in general, but not applied it on the Passover Eve, as stated explicitly in the Talmud. Alternatively, they simply maintained the unadulterated Palestinian tradition which does not recognize *zugot* pairs as triggers of evil spirits. Be as it may, they saw no reason to add an additional cup. Thus, Levinsohn explained, until Elijah arrives to decide, the fifth cup remains in limbo, under his jurisdiction as "the Cup of Elijah."

19 See: Ronis, "Do Not Go Out Alone at Night," especially 85–88, but also much of chapters 2 and 3.

20 B. Pesahim 113a, according to the geonic interpretation; see: Louis Ginzberg (ed.), *Geonica* (New York: JTS, 1909), vol. 2, 400, cited in B.M. Lewin (ed.), *Otzar ha-Geonim: Thesaurus of the Gaonic Responsa and Commentaries* (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University Press, 1930), vol. 3, #310.I, 113. However, Rashi explained that two wives might conspire against him, but if there are three, one will probably remain loyal. This "common sense" interpretation, appearing at the end of the very *sugya* on *zugot*, is curious. Another talmudic opinion (b. Pesahim 109b) states that one should not perform two consecutive sexual acts. However, it does not prescribe a third for one who has done so; the Talmud later interprets this source as referring to one who has consumed a pair of food or drink items who should not perform any sexual acts at all.

Although he explained the four cups in terms of the four expressions of redemption, Levinsohn decided against suggesting that the dispute concerning the fifth cup centered on whether *v'heveiti* should be counted as a fifth expression of redemption. Perhaps he simply felt that was too difficult to explain to his general audience. More likely, he was attracted to the *zugot* explanation because it enabled his enlightened followers to eliminate the superstitious cup of Elijah custom altogether. In addition, identifying the point of doubt as *zugot* is grounded in the Talmud itself and hence, more likely to be historically accurate. Indeed, in our chapter, the Babylonian Talmud devotes several pages to discussing whether one should be concerned for *zugot* and the views of the Sages varied (b. Pesahim fols. 109b–112b). The exemption from *zugot* on the Passover Eve (which in Levinsohn's Hebrew original is not enclosed in parenthesis): "although no danger of charms need be feared on this night, it being under the especial care of the Almighty," represents the Talmud's first solution to the problem of *zugot* concerning the four cups, attributed to Rav Nahman. Excluding the Cup of the Blessing of Grace (third cup) from the count was an alternative solution attributed to Rava. Ravina provided a third solution: each cup is a separate commandment, none of which link up to form a singular group of four or even two.²¹

Here, Levinsohn dropped two bombshell novelties in tandem, the latter hinging upon the former. First, he explained that the origin of the fifth cup was talmudic concern for *zugot*. Second, he proposed that the origin of the cup of Elijah was tension between the sages who believed in *zugot* and prescribed a fifth cup and those who did not believe and drank only the traditional four. Thus, as a compromise solution, the talmudic fifth cup was to be poured but not drunk from, as "The Cup of Elijah." Ironically, the first novelty, which paved the way for the second, has been almost completely forgotten, whereas the second, popularly attributed to the Gaon of Vilna (without basis), has grown in popularity to the point that for a large segment of modern Jewry (those "in the

21 Ravina's train of thought leads directly to Henshke's interpretation and previously influenced the geonic opinion expressed by Alfasi, to recite a blessing on each individual cup (See: *Oṣar ha-Geonim*, b. Pesahim 109b, #304.I–310, 112–113). A clever reader asks why *zugot* were not viewed as problematic in other sections of the Haggadah: the four sons and the four questions. The four sons are not a repeated activity, so *zugot* does not strictly apply. Furthermore, they are a non-essential addition to the Haggadah and while some have speculated as to their antiquity, they are only first attested to in post-talmudic Palestinian Midrashim and thus were not likely mentioned in the Babylonian communities concerned about *zugot*. See: E.D. Goldschmidt, *The Passover Haggadah: Its Sources and History* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1960), 22. As for the four questions, although these appear to have all been mentioned in the *Mishnah*, during the talmudic period there were only three, and some recite five questions (*ibid.*, 11–13).

know”) it is considered *the* historical explanation for the ubiquitous custom of the Cup of Elijah!²²

Whereas Henshke explained that the addition of the Psalms as a new liturgical segment of the *Seder* in response to the exile was the impetus for appending the extra fifth cup, here we see the opposite. The four cups traditional in Palestine were viewed in Babylon as stirring evil spirits due to *zugot*, a uniquely Babylonian concern, as explicitly stated by the Talmud.²³ Hence, the number four had to be bumped up to five. The fifth cup could not be left bare; it required a recitation just like the previous four. Otherwise, it could not join their ranks; it would be counted separately and the even number four would remain, triggering evil spirits. Thus, Psalm 23, mentioning: “Even if I should walk in the valley of death, I will not fear evil [...]” or *Hallel ha-Gadol*, Psalm 136, were selected as expressions of faith in God almighty as a protector from evil spirits, not from the hardships of the exile. The fifth cup emerges as a homegrown expression of Babylonian exilic concerns, not a direct response to exile or addressing it.

The astute reader will point out an apparently fundamental flaw in Levinsohn’s line of thought. The *baraita* source for the fifth cup is Palestinian. It mentions Rabbi Tarfon by name. So how could the fifth cup be Babylonian? As mentioned above the Talmud itself states explicitly that the sages of Palestine were not concerned with *zugot*. Henshke asserts that there are no grounds to suspect the authenticity of this *baraita*, even though there are no parallels to it in other talmudic literature, such as Tosefta, *Midrash Halakhah*, and the Palestinian Talmud to corroborate it.²⁴

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- 22 For example, E.D. Goldschmidt, *Die Pessach-Haggada: herausgegeben und erklärt* (Berlin: Schocken Verlag, 1937), 25, favored this explanation, but see Kasher’s response in *Haggadah Shlema* (Jerusalem: Torah Shleima Institute, 1962), 227. See R. Yehudah Avida, *The Cup of the Prophet Elijah*, ed. Eliezer Brodt (Jerusalem: Brodt, 2013) [Hebrew]. I hope to devote a future article to explaining some of the mechanisms of how the theory of Levinsohn the *maskil* was subsequently attributed the saintly *GR”A* and hence “purified.”
- 23 B. Pesahim 110b. See R. Solomon Judah Löb Ha-Kohen, *Rapoport (ShIR), Erekh Milin* (Prague, 1852), 231. Based upon manuscript evidence that the passage appears in a different location in some manuscripts, Yaakov Elman argues that this passage is a later scribal addition [Y. Elman, “The World of the ‘Sabboraim,’” in *Creation and Composition*, ed. J. Rubenstein (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 383–415, 403]. However, Ronis, “*Do Not Go Out Alone at Night*,” 62n61, disputes this conclusion since all eleven manuscripts do indeed contain the passage.
- 24 *Ibid.*, 130, notes 336 and 337. Henshke lists the great twentieth-century academic Talmudist J. N. Epstein as an authority who accepted the authenticity of the *Baraita* and then cites his own argument against Shamma Friedman’s proposition that the “Ben Dorstai” *Baraita* is Babylonian.

Levinsohn was clearly aware of this difficulty. He composed a short general essay on *zugot* that was published posthumously in *Yalqut RiBa”L*, one of several small compendia published at the end of the nineteenth century.²⁵ The fascinating essay is translated and annotated in an appendix to this article. Levinsohn referred obliquely to his explanation of the fifth cup from *Efes Dammim* and found Greek and Roman mythical sources which he associated with belief in *zugot*, as well as various Jewish sources not noted elsewhere in the context of *zugot*, to my knowledge. A clear implication of Levinsohn’s study on *zugot* is that both Rabbi Tarfon and the anonymous Palestinian sage who drank the fifth cup did in fact share a belief in their power. This approach corresponds to that of the great Rabbinic scholar and bibliographer R. Hayyim Yosef David Azulai (*HiD”A*, 1724–1806, Jerusalem, Livorno).²⁶ However, the sources Levinsohn gathered are either not Jewish, like Plato, or they are much later, such as Naḥmanides. They more likely relate to a universal natural concept that “second place,” being naturally inferior to “first place,” is somehow blemished; whereas the Babylonian belief in the magical power of *zugot* refers specifically to even-numbered pairs arousing evil spirits.

Levinsohn, apparently perturbed by this problem, later developed an alternate approach in a separate essay devoted to the four cups, also published posthumously in *Yalqut RiBa”L*.²⁷ There, Levinsohn listed the Palestinian Talmud’s four explanations of the four cups (the most popular one, the four Biblical expressions of redemption, he cited in *Efes Dammim*, mentioned above). He then stated that in matters such as these the sages permitted additional individual opinions, so he will offer his own, solely as speculation. In Dialogue 3 of *Efes Dammim*, Levinsohn had proposed that all ancient customs of the Passover Eve feast were modeled after feasts of Roman lords. Now he mentioned that one of their customs was to drink the number of cups of wine corresponding to the number of letters in the name of the host of the feast. Traditionally, on Passover we anticipate the prophet Elijah, who will herald the coming of the Messiah. In the Bible, Elijah’s name is often spelled אֵלִיָּהוּ, with four letters, hence the four cups, one for each letter. However, in the Book of Kings it is usually spelled אֵלִיָּהוּ, with five letters. So, some sages drank four cups and others five, depending on which spelling of Elijah’s name they considered primary. Note that Levinsohn, in *Efes Dammim*, our earliest source stating that the Cup

²⁵ Isaac ber Levinsohn, *Yalqut RiBa”L*, ed. David Ber Nathanson (Warsaw, 1878), 59–60.

²⁶ R. Hayyim Yosef David Azulai, *Petaḥ ‘Einayim* (Livorno, 1790), 61b. See this opinion described below, in the discussion of Blau’s identifications of pseudepigraphy.

²⁷ Levinsohn, *Yalqut RiBa”L*, 106–107. Although it is not dated, since this essay also refers to *Efes Dammim* explicitly, we can be certain that it was written afterwards.

of Elijah is the doubted fifth cup, stuck with it in this later interpretation, albeit in a completely different way. The notion of Elijah resolving a talmudic doubt is now gone. The later explanation counting letters appears fanciful.²⁸ Levinsohn did not withdraw his original explanation but did not seem to have been convinced by his own considerable efforts to frame *zugot* as a concern of the early Palestinian Sages.

A century later, apparently independent of Levinsohn, Joshua Trachtenberg also proposed that the fifth cup was initiated because of *zugot*.²⁹ He too cited Jewish and non-Jewish sources about concern for *zugot* (not Levinsohn's), including Ludwig Blau's German book on Jewish magic in the Talmud. Blau noted that *zugot* was a purely Babylonian concern, not attested to in Palestinian literature.³⁰ The Babylonian origin of *zugot* is explained by Mark Geller:³¹

28 It is remotely possible that Levinsohn was not serious about the interpretation offered in this unpublished essay. It may have been self-satire or "Purim Torah." Levinsohn's satire of the Hasidic movement, republished by Jonathan Meir, was originally published in this very same volume, *Yalqut RiBa"l*. See: Meir, *Words of the Righteous*.

29 Joshua Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition: A Study in Folk Religion* (New York: Temple/Atheneum, 1939), 118. Trachtenberg described a passage in the *Eṣ Ḥayyim Haggadah* from medieval England [on this manuscript, see David Kaufmann, "The Prayer-Book According to the Ritual of England before 1290," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 4(1) (1891): 20–63] that prescribes drinking the fifth cup for an *istenis* [delicate] or a sick person. According to Trachtenberg, the reason is that they are especially susceptible to demons, so they must avoid *zugot*. Trachtenberg understood the source in the context of Rashbam, cited by Tosafot 109b "Rava" that although there is no danger from demons on Passover evening, one should nevertheless worry about *zugot* for magical reasons. However, Rashbam appears to have just been explaining a *hava 'amina* of the Talmud, not the final decision. Pawning off the fifth cup on the sick and frail is simply a method of reading an authoritative source without contradicting it directly. Shalem Yahalom discusses this rabbinic method in depth in a forthcoming article. Trachtenberg was looking for magic in all the wrong places. He erroneously read it into medieval sources where it does not seem to have been a factor and was apparently completely unaware of the fact that the fifth cup is mentioned explicitly in a primary textual variant of the Talmud. Unlike Levinsohn, Trachtenberg was not familiar with the rabbinic literature [*posqim*] which describe this textual variant. The variant is found neither in the printed editions, nor in Rabinovich's *Diqduqe Sofrim*, based primarily on Ashkenazi manuscripts which also don't contain the variant, as pointed out later by Kasher (*Kos Hamishi*, 1950), so Trachtenberg's oversight was not a blunder, but may explain why his observation was not taken more seriously by subsequent scholars. It was cited by Joseph Tabori, *The Passover Ritual throughout the Generations* (Tel-Aviv: Ha-Kibbutz ha-Meyuhad, 1996), 329n83 [Hebrew], without analysis. Despite his erroneous point of entry to the topic, it appears that Trachtenberg correctly sensed the magical source of the fifth cup.

30 Ludwig Blau, *Das Altjüdische Zauberwesen* (Budapest: Alkalay, 1898), 13, note 2, cited: Judah Löb Ha-Kohen Rapoport, *Erekh Milin*, 231.

31 Markham J. Geller, "Akkadian Healing Therapies in the Babylonian Talmud," Max-Planck-Institut für Wissenschaftsgeschichte, *Preprint* 259 (2004): 56–57.

The reason for this fear of ‘pairs’ comes directly from Babylonian extispicy, which was an elaborate system in which ‘right’ and ‘left’ were used to indicate ‘good’ or ‘bad’ respectively, although it depended upon a point of reference, i.e. ‘left’ is bad for the subject but ‘good’ if it refers to his enemy. It seems probable that ‘left’ as unlucky or ‘sinister’ could refer to an ‘even’ number if one counts with one’s hands, starting with the right hand.

A *baraita* (b. Pesahim 110a) on *zugot* reads: “Our rabbis taught: One who drinks in even numbers, his blood is upon his head.” Based upon the geographic distinction, Blau proposed that the *baraita* is Babylonian, stating: “[...] *dass die Mystik vor Pseudepigraphie nicht zurückschreckt*.”³²

Recall that according to Henshke, there is no reason to doubt the authenticity of the Rabbi Tarfon *baraita* prescribing the fifth cup (b. Pesahim 118a) because it is prefaced with the formulae: *tanu rabbanan*, indicating that it was widely recited and accepted as authoritative tradition from Palestine. However, if the Babylonian rationale was avoiding *zugot*, as Levinsohn and Trachtenberg proposed, then Blau’s observation that the mystics were instinctively drawn to pseudepigraphy can undermine Henshke’s reasoning. Blau himself already identified a proximate *baraita* on *zugot* as Babylonian pseudepigraphy: “One who drinks double [...]” (also prefaced with the same “authoritative” formula: *Tanu Rabbanan*). Thus, there is not only a reason to doubt the authenticity of the Rabbi Tarfon *baraita*, but also comparable cases in the literary unit. Furthermore, Sara Ronis independently casts doubt upon the Palestinian origin of many *baraitot* in the chapter dealing with *zugot* and demonology:³³

[T]he rabbis of the Talmud invoke *baraitot*, Hebrew teachings attributed to the Tannaim, to ground their discussions of the demonic. The *sugya* actually quotes seven *baraitot* in its broader discussion, introduced by either the language of תנו רבנן (our rabbis taught), or כתניא (as it was

³² Even before Blau’s suggestion (Blau, *Das Altjüdische Zauberwesen*, 13), there is already an internal contradiction in the Talmudic literary unit on *zugot*. The Talmud claims explicitly that the Sages of Palestine were not concerned for *zugot*, yet there are two presumably Palestinian *baraitot* referring to *zugot* and the second one is prefaced with *Tanu Rabbanan*, pointed out by *HiD”A*, *Petaḥ ’einayim*, 61b. Hence, *HiD”A* resolves the contradiction by positing that the *Tannaim* in Palestine were in fact concerned with *zugot* and that the Babylonian Talmud was merely referring to later generations of Palestinian Amoraim. *HiD”A*’s interpretation allows for interpretation of the Rabbi Tarfon Fifth Cup *baraita* as referring to *zugot*, but the speculative projection of the concern back to Palestine is without external textual or historical corroboration. It is much simpler to posit that this is a Babylonian *baraita*, as per Blau.

³³ Ronis, “*Do Not Go Out Alone at Night*,” 39–41.

taught in a Tannaitic teaching). This original question is crucially supported by a *baraita* which teaches the danger of doing certain things an even number of times. However, though attributed to Tannaim, none of these seven *baraitot* has linguistic or thematic parallels in tannaitic literature. They appear only in this context, yet they are integral to the structure and thrust of the *sugya*. Shamma Friedman has shown that, even though *baraitot* are formally marked as Tannaitic, the redactors of the Bavli invent some of these ‘tannaitic’ sources to suit their larger thematic or authoritative needs [...] [I]n light of supporting linguistic and thematic evidence for a later Babylonian context, the designation of these *baraitot* in b. *Pesahim* as ‘pseudo-*baraitot*’ invented by later Amoraim or by the *stam* and patterned after authentic *baraitot* seems reasonable. This first *baraita* is not in Mishnaic Hebrew, but in a mixture of Hebrew and Aramaic, pointing to a later date for its composition. Presenting the teaching in the form of a Hebrew *baraita* serves to give it authenticity and authority in a scholarly context in which antiquity is honored.

Seven examples demonstrate a strong tendency towards pseudepigraphy, and in that context, the existence of an eighth is reasonable. On the contrary, assuming *prima facie* that the *baraita* is Palestinian, and upon that basis rejecting that it addresses *zugot*, becomes far-fetched. Furthermore, recalling that “Rabbi Ṭarfon’s” interpretation of *Hallel ha-Gadol* is Babylonian, note that the only other mention of *Hallel ha-Gadol* in tannaitic literature is by Rabbi Ṭarfon in m. Ta’anit 3:9. This convergence of authorship may not be accidental. The Babylonian pseudepigraphic author could have attributed the fifth cup recitation of *Hallel ha-Gadol* to Rabbi Ṭarfon for precisely this reason.³⁴

34 The insertions into the Tosefta and Mishnah described above in the discussion of Henshke’s approach reflect the first Palestinian interpretation of *Hallel ha-Gadol*, followed by the Babylonian Talmud in b. *Pesaḥim* 118a. On the other hand, Bar Qapara maintained that *Hallel ha-Gadol* is part of the (standard) Egyptian Hallel, already completed at the drinking of the fourth cup. Thus, we have further evidence that Rabbi Ṭarfon in the *baraita* (*Pesaḥim* 118a) is Babylonian, not the Palestinian *tanna*. The real Rabbi Ṭarfon in the *Mishnah* may have had in mind *Hallel ha-Gadol* as identified in the Palestinian Talmud, Psalms 115–116. However, the pseudepigraphic R. Ṭarfon in the Babylonian *baraita* was created after the identification of *Hallel ha-Gadol* as Psalm 136. David Halivni points out that Bar Qapara was unaware of the Rabbi Ṭarfon *baraita* and Tosefta. Halivni offers two responses: either Bar Qapara was unaware of the *baraita* or he himself already had Rashbam’s *girsa* with only four cups [*Sources and Traditions: Tractates Erubin and Pesaḥim* (New York: JTS, 1982), 588–589]. Henshke wisely rejected the second response in favor of the first. Now the decision is even clearer: at Bar Qapara’s time the Rabbi Ṭarfon *baraita* had not yet been composed!

As alluded to above, an advantage of the magical interpretation for the fifth cup vis-à-vis the Medieval Midrashic interpretation (possible fifth expression of redemption, *v'heveiti*) and Henshke's modern "meaningful" approach (response to exile) is that all of the components of the magic interpretation are well-rooted in the *sugya* unit of the Babylonian Talmud and do not require the introduction of external concepts.³⁵ The tension between maintaining the traditional four cups and initiating a fifth cup maps directly onto talmudic questions in the chapter, whether *zugot* is a valid issue of concern, and regarding the four Passover cups specifically.

Rabbinic memory loss of the original rationale for the fifth cup is also an understandable phenomenon. With the transference of talmudic traditions to Europe during the Middle Ages, it entered cultures surrounded by magical beliefs but entirely unfamiliar with the "Babylonian" principle of *zugot* [contra Levinsohn's maximalist claims found in the Appendix here]. Furthermore, with the rising impact of philosophical principles on Jewish thought during the geonic period, the original reason may have been deliberately obscured, especially in now Islamic lands where the Babylonian Talmud had been previously formed. For example, the Geonim who maintained that the fifth cup is "optional, if he desires it, and if not, he is exempt"³⁶ may have been aware of the magical origin but deliberately cloaked the reason why one may "desire it."³⁷

An unintentional side effect of suppressing the rationale for the fifth cup may have been the development of an alternative medieval legal interpretation, one based solely upon the talmudic text (with the primary fifth cup variant), apparently in the absence of a tradition. The Talmud is primarily a book of legal discussion. Hence, by default it discusses obligations and prohibitions, whereas optional or suggested acts are generally identified as such. In the talmudic context, the *baraita* expands upon the description of the Rabbinic ordinances as to how to conduct the Passover Seder properly described in the *Mishnah*. Thus, from a purely text-based perspective, it is reasonable to explain

35 Modern interpretation that employs lower criticism liberally but categorically eschews higher criticism, can unfortunately eschew both tradition and historical accuracy. See: James Kugel, *How to Read the Bible* (New York: Free Press, 2007), "Appendix 1: Apologetics' and 'Biblical Criticism Lite,'" <http://www.jameskugel.com/appendix-1-apologetics-and-biblical-criticism-lite>; Leor Jacobi, "A Dispute for Heaven's Sake," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 67 (2016): 91–101, 98n28.

36 R. Amram Gaon, cited by R. Isaac ibn Ghayyat (Spain, 1038–1089), who noted that many Geonim drank the fifth cup. Only Rav Hai Gaon did not (*Otzar ha-Geonim*, #351, 126). According to Kasher, *Kos Hamishi*, 10, this demonstrates that even Rav Hai had the textual variant with the fifth cup but interpreted it as optional.

37 See: Elman, "The World of the 'Saboraim,'" 398, 407–412; Ronis, "Do Not Go Out Alone at Night," 127n188; see above, on Rashi's explanation of why one who has married two wives should wed a third.

that Rabbi Ṭarfon and the anonymous sage *mandated* the fifth cup, *arguing* with the sages of the *Mishnah* who mandated only four (not more). Following this line of thought, R. Zerahya ha-Levy (*Ba'al ha-Maor*, Provence, twelfth century) and R. Isaiah of Trani (*RI"D*, Italy, thirteenth century) decided that the Halakhah follows the majority opinion of four cups expressed in the *Mishnah*, rejecting R. Ṭarfon's dissent in the *baraita* and the fifth cup outright.³⁸

Even with the “eclipse” of *zugot*, the fear of evil spirits at the Passover feast persisted despite the talmudic solution of *leyl shimurim*.³⁹ Rabbi Yuzpeh Shamash (Worms, 1604–1678) explained the custom of *Kos Shel Eliyahu* as: “a *segulah* of saying ‘Eliyahu’ to eliminate *maziqim* [destructive forces] and we perform various acts on the *Seder* night to chase away the *maziqim*.”⁴⁰ In *Shibole ha-Leqet*, R. Zedekiah ben Abraham Anav (Rome, thirteenth century) cited an interpretation that *ha laḥma 'anya* is recited in Aramaic (rather than Hebrew) so that the *maziqim* will not understand.⁴¹

These sources address evil spirits in general, but despite waning belief in the effects of *zugot* that the various talmudic solutions offered, even the specific fear of *zugot* from the four Passover cups was not fully allayed. R. Yosef Dov Soloveitchik asked why the door of the house is traditionally opened after the third cup.⁴² If it is a symbol for guests, why not open it after the first cup, when they are formally invited at *ha laḥma 'anya*? He responded that the door is opened in anticipation of the pouring of the fourth cup, to remind ourselves that tonight is *leyl shimurim* (as explained by Rema), when we need not worry ourselves over *zugot*, following the opinion of Rav Naḥman in the Talmud.

38 *Ba'al ha-Maor* in Vilna Talmud, Alfasi, 26b; *Pisqeh ha-RI"D* (Jerusalem: Yad Harav Herzog, 1966), vol. 2, 378–379. In arguing for the primacy of the fifth cup textual variant, Henshke proposed that the fourth cup variant was the result of a scribal error, a homoeoteleuton. This argument supports his conclusion. If eliminating the fifth cup was a rabbinic goal, it would have been just as effective to adopt this interpretation. Hence the variant is most simply explained as scribal error.

39 Most of the following examples were gleaned from Eliezer Brodt, “The Cup for the Visitor,” *Ami Magazine* (65) (April 4, 2012): 93–98.

40 *Minhaghim De-Kehal VerMeizah* (Jerusalem: Makhon Yerushalayim, 1988), 85–86, based upon the translation of Brodt, “The Cup,” 94. The originators of this custom interpreted “Elijah, of blessed memory” as “Elijah, whose mention is a blessing,” based upon the ambiguity of the Hebrew *zakhor*. On *maziqim* in the Talmud, see: Benovitz, *BT Berakhot Chapter I*.

41 *Shibole ha-Leqet* #218, ed. S. Buber (Vilna, 1887), 186. Another opinion there follows the talmudic assertion that there is no concern for *maziqim* on *leyl shimurim* (originally describing *zugot*, as explained above).

42 R. Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, *Beis ha-Levy* (Belarus, 1820–1892).

The illustrious R. Moses Sofer seems to have preceded R. Soloveitchik with the same interpretation.⁴³ He added that the recitation of *shfokh ḥamatkha* upon opening the door is addressed to the *maziqim* in an attempt to redirect them.⁴⁴ According to R. Soloveitchik, the protection from evil spirits due to *leyl shimurim* is absolute; the custom is simply a self-reminder. However, R. Sofer understood that an additional custom developed to redirect the evil spirits just in case they might actually appear. The fact that R. Soloveitchik did not comment on this great novelty of R. Sofer, that *shfokh ḥamatkha* is addressed to the evil spirits, rather than God himself, suggests that he arrived at the interpretation independently. These two great rabbinic sages of the nineteenth century reincarnated the issue of *zugot* and the four cups in order to explain post-talmudic custom, paralleling Levinsohn's proposition regarding the fifth cup in the Talmud itself.⁴⁵

Eclipsing its magical origin, the fifth cup would live on during the Middle Ages as a Babylonian custom emanating throughout the Islamic world and as an authentic textual tradition of the Babylonian Talmud in Christian Europe where belief in the powers of *zugot* pairs was not found. Stripped of its genetic magical rationale and shrouded in mystery, the fifth cup attracted new layers of homiletic meaning, bound only by the limits of Rabbinic imagination. No less mysterious than the "twilight" genesis of the fifth cup described here are the continuing sagas of its medieval disappearance and attempted revivals as a messianic symbol. I hope to address these issues at a time which is neither day nor night.

Appendix—Isaac Ber Levinsohn on *Zugot*

Source: Isaac Baer Levinsohn, *Yalqut RiBa"l*, ed. David Ber Nathanson (Warsaw: A. Ginz, 1878), 59–60. I thank Jonatan Meir for pointing me in the direction of this volume and encouraging the quest and publication of Levinsohn's lesser-known works. Levinsohn's own notes appear here as endnotes and mine as footnotes or in brackets [].

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- 43 R. Moses Sofer, the *Ḥatam Sofer* (1762–1839) was a rabbi in Frankfurt and Pressburg.
- 44 Rabbi Moses Sofer, *Sefer Ḥatam Sofer: Derashot* (New York: The Rabbi Joseph Nehemiah Kornitzer Institute, 1961), vol. 2, 548.
- 45 R. Sofer's observations are dated 1834, contemporaneous to Levinsohn, but prior to R. Soloveitchik, and he may have learned of Levinsohn's concept and adapted it, perhaps even filtered down to him as attributed to R. Ephraim Zalman Margolioth (Brody, 1762–1828) in *Haggada shel Pesah* ["*ha-F'la'ah*"], ed. R. Zvi Hirsch Hurwitz (1866; repr., Jerusalem: Sefarim Torani'am, 1984), unpaginated, see at *sh'fokh ḥamatkha*. A future study on the reception of Levinsohn's novelties is anticipated.

The Babylonian Talmud, Chapter *Arve Pesahim*, pp. 109–110, expounds at length on the matter of concern about *zugot*, even numbered events (see [my] *Efes Dammim*, at the end of the third dialogue in the final note).⁴⁶ In early general literature, I found that both the Greek philosopher Pythagoras and his student Plato were most particular about the number two. They believed that it indicates very bad omen. During the era of Pythagoras, this belief was prevalent over the entire Italian region. The Romans also believed in the terrible powers of the number two. Since they customarily consecrated all evil things to the god Pluto,ⁱ we find in mythological books of the early Romans that the second month of the year and the second day of that month were consecrated to this god. See: A. Baniers, *Götterlehre*, Band 4, p. [3]70.⁴⁷ This appears to be the reason that to this very day we do not begin projects on the second day of the week (Monday).⁴⁸ Our Sages (who generally sought scriptural hints at established customs) noted [in Gen. Rab. 4:7] that the second of the six days of creation is the only one in which *ki tov*, “that it is good” [Gen 1:6–8], is not written.ⁱⁱ We also treat the fourth day of the week like the second day, and do not begin projects on it. The Talmud (*Ta’anit* [27b]) states that children are susceptible to the *askara* disease on that day; thus, the members of the judicial court customarily fast on Wednesday so that the children will not be afflicted, see there, in depth [and PT *Ta’anit* 4:3, 68b]. Also, see Rashi’s Bible commentary to the verse “let there be luminaries

- 46 Levinsohn’s note in *Efes Dammim*: “See Talmud *Pesahim* (109b–) for an extensive treatment of concern for *zugot*. There (110b) it is stated that two eggs [...] and an additional item are *halakhah l’Moshe mi-Sinai*. The Rabbinic Sages were uncertain as to the identity of the additional item, so they issued a *zugot* decree regarding all items. See the talmudic source. Thus, wine fell under suspicion as well. We find that several Amoraic Sages had their servants prepare an additional cup for them when they were drinking an even numbered cup (110)” (translated from a later Hebrew edition [Warsaw: Levine-Epstein, 1903], 40).
- 47 Antoine Banier, *Erläuterung der Götterlehre und Fabeln aus der Geschichte*, trans. Johann Adolf Schlegel (Leipzig: Dyck, 1765), vol. 4, 70 (not page 370). Thanks to Lisa Sophie Gebhard for locating the correct page, and helping to translate the source. Baniers also mentioned that animals were sacrificed to Pluto on 2 February, and that Plato compared the number two to the goddess Diana.
- 48 See the responsum attributed to Naḥmanides cited by *Beit Yosef, Tur YD*, #179(2) and paraphrased in his *Shulḥan Arukh* [= *Responsa of Rashba*] (Jerusalem: Makhon Yerushalayim, 2001), vol. 7, #283, 231]. Also, see *Zohar, Pinḥas*, 234a and *Tiqqunei Zohar* #69, 101b, cited by R. Elijah of Vilna (*GR”A*) in his *B’ur* [*Shulḥan Arukh* ad. loc.], where the custom is presented as an amoraic dictum! The author is unaware of the passage in the *Zohar*, supporting attribution to Naḥmanides. See: Reimund Leicht, “Naḥmanides on Necromancy,” in *Studies in the History of Culture and Science*, eds. R. Fontaine et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 251–264; David Berger, “Miracles and the Natural Order in Naḥmanides” in *Rabbi Moses Naḥmanides (Ramban)*, ed. I. Twersky (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 107–128. I am grateful to Pinchas Roth for assistance with this responsum.

in the firmament" [Gen 1:14, where he explains that the day is cursed because] the word *me'orot* 'luminaries' is defective [suggesting *me'arah*, 'curse']. However, it is distinctly possible that the number four is considered to not be good because of *zugot*, as it is a double pair. Tractate *Pesahim* of the Babylonian Talmud [112b] also states that on the eve of the fourth day [= Tuesday night] Agrat bat Maḥlat ventures out (see my *Bet Yehudah* for speculation as to the original identity of Agrat, the *qelipah* "shell").⁴⁹ Finally, to defuse these primitive beliefs from the hearts of the masses, our sages maintained elsewhere that Monday and Wednesday are, in fact, excellent days to begin projects, with a mnemonic: *Ba"D qodesh*, "holy Monday and Wednesday," literally "holy fabric."⁵⁰

- 49 Isaac Baer Levinsohn, *Beit Yehudah* (Vilna: Man & Zimmel, 1839), 328–329. Eusebius cites Sanchuniathon, an ancient Phoenician, who describes a Canaanite god named Agrot. Levinsohn proposed identifying this god with Agrat bat Maḥlat and referred to his own pamphlet on mythology. In his letter to R. David Luria, Levinsohn claimed that the "new Kabbalah" of the *Zohar* was based upon "early Babylonian, Egyptian, Canaanite, and Greek Mythology" (*Yalqut RiBa"L*, 75–76. Levinsohn also speculated that the old, lost Kabbalah of the talmudic sages was based upon such mythology!) and offered to send his writings to Luria subsequently. Luria apparently never responded and may not even have received Levinsohn's letter dated 1854 (5615) as Luria died in 1855 (early 5616). The publisher, D. B. Nathanson, noted that he couldn't find the writings referred to and suggested *Pituḥei Ḥotam*, which he finally published in 1903, but the closest material it contains is an essay on *Meṭatron*, 26–35. An oblique reference to Agrat is found in a Babylonian magic bowl, see Saul Shaked, "Magical Bowls and Incantation Texts: How to Get Rid of Demons and Pests," *Qadmoniot* 129 (2005): 2–13, 10 [Hebrew]. I thank Matthew Morgenstern for this reference. A direct reference in a magic bowl is speculatively suggested in Ronis, "Do Not Go Out Alone at Night," 121n177. On Agrat in the Talmud, see: Ronis, *ibid.*, 113, 120–122, 144, 187.
- 50 Lev 16:4, playing on the word *BaD*: B=2, Monday; D=4, Wednesday.

- i Elsewhere [see Levinsohn's reference above to his *Beit Yehudah*], we established that he is referred to by Cabbalists as *siṭra aḥra* and *adam bel'ial*, as well as by other names. Our Sages refer to him as *sam-el*. The Cabbalists also maintain that impure and spoiled gifts should be offered to the *siṭra aḥra*, as he desires them (as the Romans and Greeks believed regarding Pluto). This explains our custom that women contaminate one suffering from illness with their urine and the like, to appease the *qelipah*, serving as a sacrificial offering to placate it so that it will distance itself from the person suffering from illness. Many other customs can be explained in this manner.
- ii Gen. Rab. [4:7] explains that *gehenom*, hell, was created on the second day, as the verse states: "for a hearth was prepared yesterday" [Isa 30:33; according to the Midrash this indicates a day which has a yesterday, but no day before yesterday, thus, the second day of creation]. Let the reader recall the location of the seat of Pluto's rule, according to mythology. Furthermore, the midrash adds a pithy ethical exposition: on the second day, *mahloqet*, division [compared to dispute], was created, as the verse states: *va-yehi mavdil*, "and it shall be divided" (you should study this source thoroughly). [On the evolution of the term *mahloqet*, see Jacobi, "A Dispute for Heaven's Sake."]