

The History of the Passover Seder Plate

This is a holiday devoted to telling the story of the book of EXODUS (where the Israelites were led by Moses out of slavery) through ritual foods and acts which engage young and old alike. It begins with a plate of food, the SEDER PLATE.

Every item on this plate has a CONFESSIONAL and HISTORICAL significance.

CONFESSIONAL = Based on the bible and spiritual belief, also called MYTHS. May or may not be factual

HISTORICAL = The "best guess" of experts as to what is truly factual. Based on corroborated evidence from sources BESIDES the bible

Matzah is a dry, cracker-like bread. Most other types of bread aren't allowed during the week of Passover

CONFESSIONALLY, this is the only bread Moses and his followers were able to bake on the desert rock during their journey out of Egypt

HISTORICALLY, although there is no evidence of the mass "exodus" of the bible, it seems entirely likely people did resort to eating this dry bread

Maror is similar to the karpas, a bitter vegetable. In Ashkenazi (originating from Eastern Europe) families, this is usually horseradish

HISTORY: where do these traditions come from?
GRECO-ROMAN CULTURE

- The **tallit** likely originates in the similar roman jurist robes
- The **afikomen** likely originates from the greek word which roughly translates to "after-party," but in Judaism refers to the broken piece of matzah children must find in order to end the meal
- The ritual of **lifting the seder plate** is likely derived from the greco-roman banquet

CANAANITE AGRICULTURAL TRADITIONS

There is evidence to suggest that the seder as it is celebrated today likely has its origins in the merging of **two different holidays** celebrated in the Ancient Near East:

- **One holiday** was theorized to be a week-long festival by a **sedentary** group celebrating the first corn harvest of the season, which had no animal sacrifice.
- This festival merged with a **second holiday** by a **nomadic** group which did include an animal sacrifice. It likely didn't have a set date of celebration before they merged.

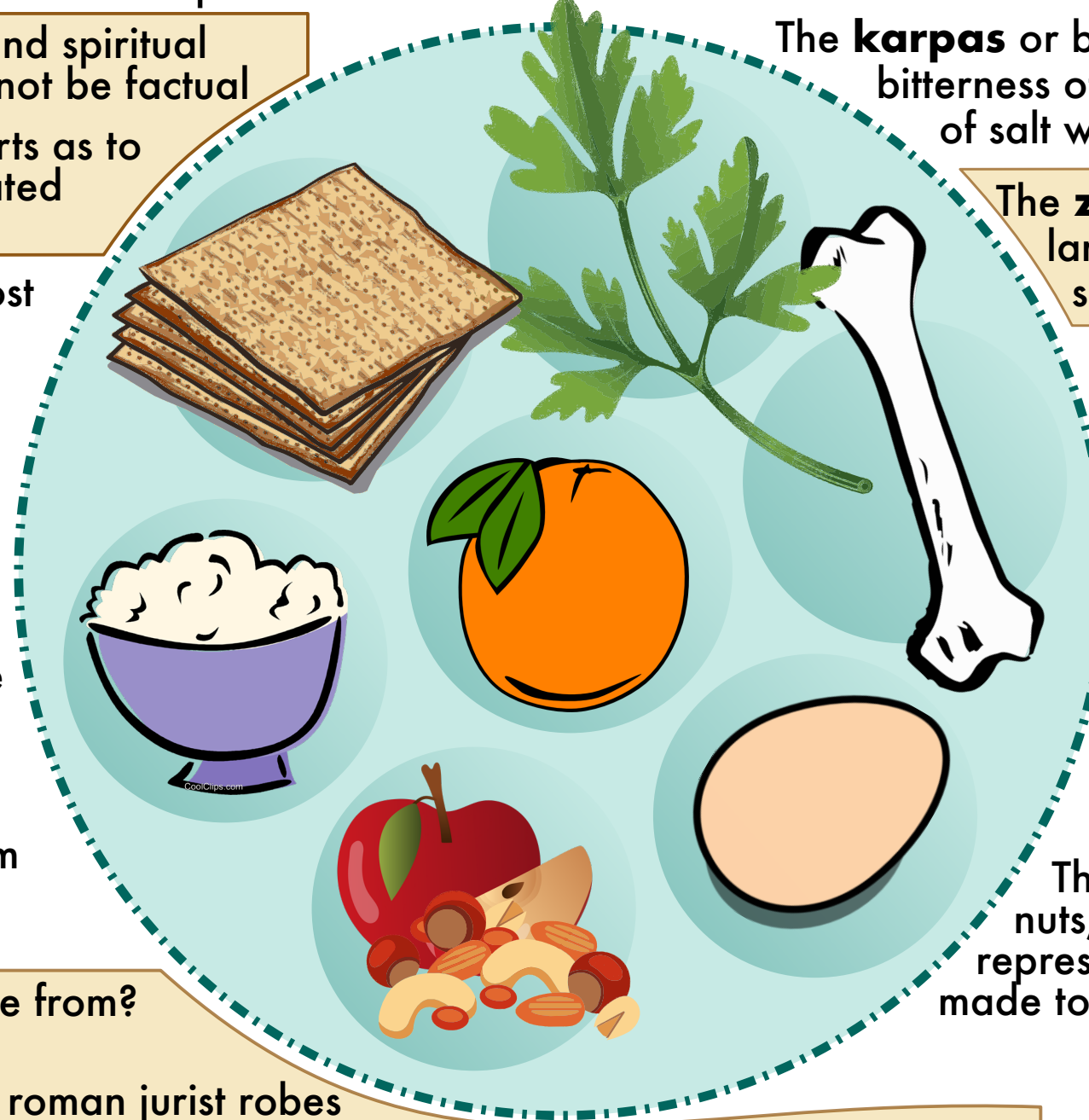
The **karpas** or bitter herbs is usually meant to represent the bitterness of slavery, and is often dipped in a solution of salt water which represents the tears of the slaves

The **zeroa** or shank bone commemorates the lamb sacrifice which was performed during second temple Judaism

An **orange** is sometimes placed on the seder plate in commemoration of the rights of women, widows, and queer jews. It was innovated by the feminist scholar Susannah Heschel

The **betsa** or egg commemorates a more minor meat sacrifice that was performed as part of the seder during the second temple period. Some also give it the ritual significance of representing spring and rebirth

The **charoset** or apple "paste" is a mixture of nuts, fruit, and wine. It is sometimes said to represent the "mortar" which the slaves were made to use in their forced labour



Listen to the full podcast!
<https://bit.ly/3f7UZk3>

Bibliography

Bokser, Baruch M. *The Origins of the Seder*. University of California Press, 1984.

Cohn, Naftali S. "Chapter 1, Rabbis as Jurists of Judaeon Ritual Law and Competing Claims for Authority." *The Memory of the Temple and the Making of the Rabbis*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013.

Prosic, Tamara. *The Development and Symbolism of Passover until 70 CE*. T&T Clark International, 2004.