This paper looks at two vegetables, artichokes and cucumbers, as they appear in talmudic and classical literature, in connection with the figures of Rabbi Judah haNasi and the Roman Emperor Tiberius. In both cases these vegetables appear as symbols of high status, and I shall be examining Jewish and classical attitudes to them. The combination of Jewish and classical sources makes the paper most appropriate as a contribution to this celebration of Ranon Katzoff, whose interest in both Judaism and Hellenism, and consistent willingness to share his expertise, have given me much over the years of our friendship.

By the time Rabbi Judah haNasi became leader of the Jews of the Land of Israel in the third century, provincia Palaestina had been part of the Graeco-Roman world for hundreds of years. From Rabbi’s Mishnah and the later talmudic literature it is clear that Jews shared many aspects of Graeco-Roman culture with their non-Jewish neighbours, including both some foods and some attitudes to food. As reflected in the talmudic literature, identifications of foods and even attitudes to them changed very little over time, as opposed to the complex development of halakhot. I therefore take examples from different

places in talmudic literature, not necessarily in chronological order of writing or editing. I am also of the opinion, nowadays less fashionable, that the Babylonian Talmud sometimes preserves information about late antique Palestine.\(^2\)

We can identify many Greek (and fewer Latin) food-names in the Aramaic and Hebrew of the written texts of the talmudic literature. The rabbis sometimes use Greek terminology to explain food names. Thus, for example, biblical regulations on agriculture include a ban on growing two different kinds of crops together. Mishnah Kilayim discusses what kinds of vegetables are allowed to be grown together with the vines in a vineyard. Transgression of this ban would mean that the vines could not be used—so the rabbis were careful to distinguish between what are seen as deliberately sown crops, and thus forbidden in the vineyard, and wild growths, which are permitted. We learn that thistles (qotzim) are allowed in a vineyard, i.e. they are seen as wild growths, but artichokes (qinras) are not allowed, so that it is clear that artichokes are seen as cultivated rather than wild growths.\(^3\) Qotz, the wild thistle, is a biblical Hebrew term, while the Aramaic qinras appears to be derived from the Greek for artichoke, kinara or kynara. We shall see that artichokes were carefully cultivated in the Graeco-Roman world; presumably their name came with the agricultural methods which turned wild thistles into cultivated artichokes. This, and other talmudic discussions, can help us to identify and distinguish among different kinds of plants.

Mishnaic qishuin (and indeed biblical qishuim) are usually translated as ‘cucumbers.’ The Modern Hebrew term qishuim nowadays refers to courgettes or zucchini. However, these came from the Americas. In this paper we shall be concerned with both artichokes and cucumbers which Pliny (Rome, first century CE) tells us were eaten by the Roman aristocracy and which the Babylonian Talmud attributes to Rabbi Judah haNasi. We begin with cucumbers.

IDENTIFICATION OF ‘CUCUMBERS’

We begin with the problems of identifying qishuim. In the Bible (Numbers 11:5) the children of Israel in the wilderness, condemned to eat the dry manna, are said to have longed for qishuim, among other things. Biblical qishuim, usually translated as ‘cucumbers,’ have been identified by Feliks and Zohary as chate melons, Cucumis melo var. Chate, which were cucumber-shaped, and

\(^2\) These two premises in my analysis of foodways in talmudic times will be the subject of further substantiation in the future.

\(^3\) Mish. Kilayim 5.8. On eating wild thistles, especially in the Sabbatical year, see the discussion in Weingarten 2005c.
usually cooked before eating. The term *qishuin* appears throughout the talmudic literature, almost always in agricultural contexts. Paris has recently suggested that by the Mishnaic period the term *qishuin* refers to the snake melon (also known as the snake cucumber), *Cucumis melo* subsp. *melo Flexuosus*, which is very closely related to the chate melon, but is more snake-like in shape. The snake melon is covered with a downy coating which has to be removed before eating. This process of removing the hairs appears to be referred to in the Mishnah as *piquis*, from the Greek ποκίζειν, to shave, and mediaeval Arabic sources actually call the snake melon ‘*faqqous*.’ I have bought some hairy snake melons in the market in Safed, where they are sold under the name of *faqqous*, or Arab cucumber.

The Babylonian Talmud reports *qishuin* on the table of Rabbi Judah ha-Nasi. These were clearly very desirable vegetables, but it is not absolutely clear whether they were chate melons, snake melons or the modern cucumber. Some Mishnaic sources note *qishuin* together with *delu’in*, gourds, which need cooking, as well as *avatiḥim*, watermelons, and *melafefonim*, but in the source about the vegetables of Rabbi’s table *qishuin* are listed with radishes and lettuce, which appear to have been eaten raw, with or without salt or a dressing.

Turning now to classical sources, it is possible that the Latin *cucumis*, usually translated ‘cucumber,’ also refers to the snake melon. Pliny notes the hairy covering (*lanugo*) of the *cucumis*, and the Latin writer on agriculture, Columella, calls it *hirtus*, hairy. The collection of recipes attributed to Apicius talks of ‘*cucumeres rasos,*’ shaved or scraped cucumbers. While ‘*rasos*’ can mean scraped or peeled, it is particularly used of shaving hair, and may thus back up the suggestion that these were hairy snake melons, rather than our modern ‘cucumbers.’ As for our modern cucumber, *Cucumis sativus*, eaten raw, it is not clear whether this had arrived in Mediterranean lands by the classical period. If it had, it may have been sought after because of its novelty.
In the fourth century, the church father Jerome, who was in contact with Jews, lived in Palestine for thirty-five years, and studied Hebrew, translates biblical *qishuim* as *cucumeres*, the same term used by Pliny (see below, n.19) for the desirable cucumbers on the table of the emperor Tiberius. Recently, however, the botanists Janick and Paris have suggested, in a number of convincingly argued papers (which refer to both the classical and Jewish sources as well as many ancient pictorial representations), that *cucumeres* and *qishuin* both refer to the snake melon, pointing out that there is no definite visual evidence for the modern cucumber in Europe before the fourteenth century.\(^{12}\)

Whether we accept the identification with the snake melon or not, it at least seems clear that both talmudic *qishuin* and Roman *cucumeres* seem to be referring to the same vegetable. In this paper we shall continue to call it ‘cucumber,’ in full knowledge that this may be anachronistic.

**OUT OF SEASON VEGETABLES: ‘CUCUMBERS’**

Exotic spices and meats have long been recognised as luxury foods. Dormice and peacocks’ tongues were famously foods at Roman banquets with their conspicuous consumption.\(^{13}\) Vegetables, on the other hand, were not usually praised by ancient authors, who tended to regard them as second-rate food.\(^{14}\) This view seems to be shared by both classical and Jewish sources. For example, according to Midrash Genesis Rabbah, the extraordinarily desirable pottage for which Esau sold his birthright to Jacob had in it ‘the taste of bread, the taste of meat, the taste of fish, the taste of locusts: the taste of all the good things in the world.’\(^{15}\) The taste of vegetables is conspicuously lacking here. Similarly, in the Babylonian Talmud, Rav Hisda says he didn’t eat vegetables when he was poor, as they increased his appetite, nor when he was rich, as then he could eat fish and meat.\(^{16}\)

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\(^{12}\) Janick, Paris & Parrish 2007; Paris & Janick 2008a, 33-42; Paris & Janick 2008b with bibliographies. While Paris and Janick appear to be correct about the absence of pictures of modern cucumbers before the 14\textsuperscript{th} century, this is, of course, an argument *ex silentio*.

\(^{13}\) But see the now classic article by Beard 2005.

\(^{14}\) Gowers 1996 index s.v. ‘vegetables’.

\(^{15}\) Midrash Genesis Rabbah Toldot 67.2.

\(^{16}\) Bab. Shabbat 140b.
However, there were some vegetables which were different: they were available out of season. The diet of people in the ancient world in general was dependent on seasonality to a far greater extent than today. As late as the sixteenth century, one of the expressions of impossible magical powers attributed to the Devil was the provision of grapes in winter.\textsuperscript{17} Not to be dependent on the seasons was to have boundless, almost supernatural power. In Palestine, then as now, green vegetables sprouted with the winter rains, but dried up by the summer. In antiquity, only the extraordinarily rich could circumvent this cycle by transporting foods from afar, or cultivating them with complex and expensive artificial methods. Old-fashioned Roman aristocrats who, in theory at least, approved of the simple life, disapproved of such luxury, and especially disapproved of tampering with nature. Pliny pours scorn on self-indulgent gourmets who import cultivated artichokes from the ends of the empire,\textsuperscript{18} while Columella, his contemporary, even looks askance at the emperor Tiberius who so loved cucumbers that he had them cultivated for his table in wheeled boxes under ‘transparent stone’ or glass frames so they could be brought to him every day, even in the winter.\textsuperscript{19} Columella wonders if this was really worth all the effort.

Pliny relates to this information about Tiberius’ out-of-season \textit{cucumeres} in the following passage:

\begin{quote}
…the cucumber, a delicacy for which the emperor Tiberius had a remarkable partiality: in fact there was not a day on which he was not supplied with it, as his kitchen gardeners had cucumber beds mounted on wheels which they moved into the sun and on wintry days withdrew under the cover of frames glazed with transparent stone.\textsuperscript{20}
\end{quote}

Rabbi Judah haNasi, also known simply as ‘Rabbi’, is also noted in the talmudic sources as having out-of-season \textit{qishuin} on his table, over a hundred

\textsuperscript{17} Magic grapes: Christopher Marlowe \textit{Dr Faustus} Act IV, scene vii. It is interesting that \textit{qishuin} are actually associated with magic in \textit{Mish. Sanhedrin} 7.11, and the \textit{gemara} on this in \textit{Bab. Sanhedrin} 68a, where Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi ‘Aqiva are discussing the 3000 halakhot about magical activities with \textit{qishuin}, and some of the magic actually takes place. This deserves further discussion, but this is not the place to go into it.

\textsuperscript{18} H.N. 19, 152-3

\textsuperscript{19} Col. \textit{de re rustica} 11. 51-53. \textit{Syme} 1989 notes that this is the only time Columella mentions Tiberius, or for that matter any other emperor.

\textsuperscript{20} Plin. \textit{H.N.} 19.64 : \textit{Cucumis, mira voluptate Tiberio principi expetitus: nullo quippe non die contigit ei pensiles eorum hortos promoventibus in solem rotis olitoribus rursusque hibernis diebus intra specularium munimenta revocantibus.} The \textit{specularia} mentioned here appear to have been transparent plates of thin mica which were also used as a substitute for window glass; cf. Plin. \textit{H.N.} 36.160f and \textit{Leon} 1926 (\textit{non vidi}: ap. \textit{André} 1964). They were also used to close in rooms where fruit was preserved (Plin. \textit{H.N.} 15.59): \textit{André} 1964, 122.
years later. This is in the context of a cluster of stories in the Babylonian Talmud telling of Rabbi’s relations with ‘Antoninus,’ a Roman emperor. Scholars now think that these stories are not to be taken literally, but are there to express Rabbi’s unusually close relationship with the higher representatives of Roman rule in Palestine, and his own powerful status as their familiar. The differences between the Palestinian traditions about Rabbi and ‘Antoninus’ and the Babylonian traditions is a very complex issue and beyond the scope of this paper. However, it is clear that Rabbi was a prominent figure in both Talmudim because of the fact that he was the redactor of the Mishnah. The Babylonian Talmud often underlines his wealth and other signs of status. In this source Rabbi and ‘Antoninus’ are described as fabulously wealthy:

‘And the Lord said unto her: Two nations [goyim] are in thy womb’ (Genesis, 25:23): Do not read ‘nations’ [goyim], but two very rich men [gey’im] And Rav Judah quoted Rav: [These are] Antoninus and Rabbi.22

Here the biblical verse about the pregnancy of the matriarch Rebecca refers to the twins she is carrying: Jacob, the patriarch-to-be, and his brother Esau. God tells her that they are destined to become ‘two nations.’ The Babylonian Talmud expands on this verse: since Jacob is the ancestor of Israel, and Esau was traditionally seen as the ancestor of Rome, they are represented by the rich and powerful Rabbi Judah haNasi, prince of Israel, and ‘Antoninus,’ the Roman emperor.

In the continuation of this passage on the same page of the Talmud, another of these stories about Rabbi Judah haNasi and ‘Antoninus’ represents their status through their food. In this particular case, the passage in question is attributed to Rav Yehudah, who cites Rav. Rav was Rabbi’s actual pupil, who left Palestine for Babylonia around 219 CE, according to the Iggeret of Rav Sherira Gaon. The story can therefore be seen as originating in Rabbi’s most intimate Palestinian circle:23

... Antoninus and Rabbi: There was no lack of radish or lettuce or cucumbers from their table, neither in the days of sun, nor in the days of rain.24

21 On Rabbi and ‘Antoninus’ see now, for example, Gray 2005 who quotes the older literature on this subject; Oppenheimer 2007, 43-50.
22 Bab. Berakhot 57b.
23 I am grateful to Yuval Shahar for pointing this out to me.
24 Bab. Berakhot 57b:
The construction of this Hebrew passage in the Babylonian Talmud is surprisingly similar in places to Pliny’s Latin: both are expressed grammatically as negative statements:

Pliny: there was no day when he was not supplied with [cucumbers]
BT: There was no lack of radish or lettuce or cucumbers from their table

and both passages cite the continuous availability of the cucumbers in the sun/sunny days:

Pliny: sun
BT: days of sun

or wintry/rainy days:

Pliny: winter days
BT: days of rain

Pliny notes only cucumbers here, while the talmudic passage cites three vegetables: radishes, lettuce and cucumbers. We may conclude that this story of a Roman emperor and his cucumbers which were available in all seasons would seem to have become proverbial. The classical story, then, has been transferred to Rabbi and ‘Antoninus’ as a mark of their high status. This version even goes further than the original: Tiberius just had an uninterrupted supply of cucumbers; Rabbi (and Antoninus) have a non-stop supply of lettuce and radishes as well. It is unclear whether this was a deliberate comparison, however, or whether the story simply grew over time.

In the later talmudic literature, we find that this proverbial status symbol of a never-ceasing supply of cucumbers is pushed back into semi-mythological time, as one of the stories which gathered round the table of Solomon, king of Israel. There is no evidence that Solomon, although reputed to be the wisest of kings, knew of the technology reported by Pliny and Columella for raising cucumbers under transparent stone or glass. But Midrash Deuteronomy Rabbah writes that Solomon’s table lacked neither beetroot, tered, in the summer nor cucumbers in the winter.25 Beetroot roots were not developed in

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25 Midrash Deuteronomy Rabbah 1,5: Had another said: He hath made everything beautiful in its time (Eccl 3:2), they might have said: ‘How can one who has not eaten a proper meal in his life declare “He hath made everything beautiful in its time”? But for Solomon, of whom scripture says: And those officers provided victual for King Solomon... They let nothing be lacking (I Kings 5.7), which latter words R Hama bar Hanina interpreted to mean that they supplied him with beet in the summer and cucumbers in the winter, it was fitting to declare ‘He hath made everything beautiful in its time.’ (RABBINOWITZ 1939).
antiquity, so the source here must be referring to the leaves, at their best usually during the rainy winter. Midrash Ecclesiastes Rabbah writes that Solomon’s table lacked neither roses in the summer nor cucumbers in the winter. The variant ‘rose,’ דבר vered, instead of ‘beetroot,’ דבר tered, could be due to a copyist’s mistake, for the words are very similar in Hebrew, but it may also perhaps point to some knowledge on the part of the editor of the midrash of ancient banqueting customs, for it was common for banqueters to be adorned with garlands of flowers.

While the latest appearances we have traced of these out-of-season cucumbers have been pushed back into mythology, it is still possible that the original story as applied to Rabbi Judah haNasi, while probably exaggerated, may have had some sort of contemporaneous factual basis. True, there is no evidence that Rabbi had vegetables grown for him under glass like Tiberius, although there is mishnaic evidence that cucumbers could be grown in boxes. However, other talmudic sources make it clear that part of Rabbi’s wealth lay in his extensive holdings of land in different parts of Palestine and even outside the province: he had land in Syria, for example, as well as the Jordan valley. The hot, fertile Jordan valley would have been ideal for raising very early vegetables, and indeed the Jerusalem Talmud tells us that Rabbi Judah haNasi used to bring the first-fruits of his cucumbers to ‘the government.’ It must have been expensive to bring vegetables by land from places relatively so distant from Galilee, but this transport from far away—which meant overcoming the normal local cycle of the seasons too—also served to underline Rabbi’s status. It is a mark of his wealth and power that he not only ate the out-of-season vegetables which graced the table of the emperor himself, but actually supplied them to the Roman authorities.

Out-of-season vegetables in general were so desirable that cooks sometimes went to great lengths to trick people into thinking they were being served. Athenaeus, another near-contemporary of Rabbi, who came from Nau-

26 Dalby 2003, s.v. ‘beet’.
27 Midrash Ecclesiastes Rabbah ii, 5, 1: For all that came unto King Solomon’s table... they let nothing be lacking (1 Kings 5:7): What does ‘They let nothing be lacking’ mean? R Hama bar Hanina said: Never did Solomon’s table lack anything: neither roses in summer nor cucumbers in winter, but he enjoyed those the whole year. (Cohen 1939).
28 Dunbabin 2003, 116, 156, 159 pl. XV and figs. 64, 93.
29 Mish. ‘Uqtzin 2.9
30 Jordan valley: afarsemon shel bet Rabbi, Bab. Berakhot 43a; qishuin may also have come from the hot region of Tiberias where Rabbi had also lands. We note that the Yerushalmi also notes that artichokes (qinarim) were grown at Bet Yerah and Tzinbarei: Yer. Megillah 1.1 70a, col. 740.
31 Yer. Ma’aser Sheni 4.1 54d, col. 298.
cratis in Roman Egypt, was the author of the *Deipnosophistae*, an account of banqueting philosophers probably set in Rome itself. Athenaeus writes that cooked gourds were served in winter at the banquet which is the theme of his book, and they misled the participants into thinking they were fresh—but they were merely a cook’s trick, using dried gourds.\(^{32}\) However, they reminded the banqueters of Aristophanes’ lost play *Seasons*, where cucumbers, grapes and other fruit are said to be on sale in Athens, which is thus become like Egypt, famed for its out-of-season vegetables because of the flooding of the Nile.\(^{33}\) Ironically, Aristophanes writes, this has led to financial disaster for the sellers—with vegetables available all year, they could no longer charge high prices for them! Aristophanes, as cited here by Athenaeus, would seem to be satirising the enormous efforts people made to have (or to appear to have) out-of-season vegetables and fruit.

**VEGETABLES BROUGHT FROM AFAR: ARTICHOKEs**

Turning now to artichokes, although we have already noted that they are one of the few vegetables in the talmudic sources whose name can be definitely identified philologically because the term *qinras* comes from the Greek *ki-nara* or *kynara*, it is still difficult to know whether the artichoke proper is meant here, or rather the closely related cardoon.\(^{34}\) It is clear, however, that there were a number of edible thistles which grew wild, and that the artichoke is a cultivated variety. The medical writer Galen describes the artichoke as ‘overvalued.’\(^{35}\) This was partly because of its negative health properties, for he saw it as unwholesome, sometimes hard and woody, with bitter juice. So he recommends boiling artichokes and adding coriander if eating them with oil and *garum*;\(^{36}\) or frying them in a pan.

\(^{32}\) Ath. 9.372, p. 187. I am grateful to Andrew Dalby for this reference. Foods masquerading as other foods were clearly popular with Roman banqueters, and there are recipes for them in *Apicius*, e.g. the recipe at 4.2.12 *patina de abua sine abua* ends: ‘no one will know what he is eating.’

\(^{33}\) On different seasons for vegetables in Egypt because of the flooding of the Nile, see Weingarten 2009.

\(^{34}\) The identification of the Latin term *cardui* with artichokes, rather than cardoons, has recently been questioned: Wright 2009.

\(^{35}\) Gal. *Alim. Fac.* 6.2.636

\(^{36}\) *Garum* was the famous Graeco-Roman salty fermented fish-sauce, called *liquamen* by Apicius, used widely as a condiment. Dalby 2003, s.v. *garum*; Curtis 1991; Grant 1999; Grainger & Grocock 2006, 373-387: *Appendix 4: Excursus on garum and liquamen*. It is found in the talmudic literature under the name of *muries*: Weingarten 2005b.
But Galen’s objections to artichokes may not be merely medical. They may also be an echo of the attitude we find in Pliny, who tells us that artichokes were exceptionally prized by the gourmets of Rome, and that there was a roaring trade in them. Pliny disapproved:

‘There still remains an extremely profitable article of trade which must be mentioned, not without a feeling of shame. The fact is that it is well-known that at Carthage, and particularly at Cordoba, crops of carduos, artichokes, yield a return of 6000 sesterces from small plots—since we turn even the monstrosities of the earth to purposes of gluttony ... they are conserved in honey-vinegar with silphium and cumin, so that there should be no day without thistles for dinner.’

Pliny, writing in the first century, uses all the tricks of rhetoric to put over his disapproval of this ridiculous fad of over-valuing artichokes, and eating them out of season: note the alliteration and assonance of carduos with Carthago and Corduba, which he presumably despised as far-away provincial cities. He is also indignant about the enormous prices charged for them, satirising the rich who eat the artichokes as being lower than the animals who despise them. His diatribe does not seem to have been generally successful. Artichokes were still clearly prized in the Roman world of the third and fourth centuries: a mosaic from the so-called ‘House of the Buffet Supper’ in Antioch shows them on a silver tray as a first course for dinner. And in a Palestinian context, another mosaic with what look like two purplish artichoke heads and a silver bowl, dated to the third century, has been found recently in excavations of ancient Jerusalem—or rather Aelia Capitolina.

The classical picture of artichokes as food for the rich and upper classes is confirmed by the talmudic literature. For example, Midrash Esther Rabbah, writes:

38 Plin. H.N. 19.152-3: certum est quippe carduos apud Carthaginem magnam Cordubamque praecipue sestertium sena milia e parvis redderareis, quoniam portent quoque terrarium in ganeam vertimus, serimusque etiam ea quae refugiunt cunctae quadrupedes ... condiantur quoque aceto melle diluto addita laseris radice et cumino, ne quis dies sine carduo sit.
39 On Pliny’s distrust of the ‘foreign’ taking over the Roman, an old Roman literary trope, see MURPHY 2004, 68ff.
40 On Pliny’s hostility to luxury, a traditional theme of Latin poetry: MURPHY 2004, 71. See also BEAGON 1992, 190: ‘moral condemnation of luxuria is more than a commonplace to Pliny.’
41 CIAMOK 1995, 44-47.
42 The mosaic was excavated by Shlomit Wexler-Bdollach and is to be published by Rina Talgam. I am grateful to both for allowing me to see their unpublished pictures and text.
‘Bar Yohania made a feast for the notables of Rome … What was missing? Only the qinras (=artichoke).’

One of the reasons for the perceived desirability of artichokes as food may also have been the effort needed to prepare them—an effort usually only available to the rich through their slaves; the poor would have had little time for this. But one time when the poorer Jews would have had time would be on a festival, when ordinary work was not allowed, but food-preparation was permitted, as it contributed to the enjoyment of the festival. The Tosefta specifically states that while cutting vegetables was generally not allowed on a festival (lest people actually go and cut them down in the fields), trimming artichokes and ‘akavit/’aqubit, a wild thorny plant, was allowed, as this was part of the preparation needed for cooking these prickly vegetables, which was allowed on a festival:

‘[On a festival] they do not cut vegetables with shears but they do trim the qinras, artichoke, and the ‘akavit/’aqubit.’

Whether poorer people actually ate artichokes as special festival food, or rather only ate the wild ‘akavit/’aqubit is unclear from this source.

The Babylonian Talmud records that artichokes were sent over long distances to be eaten by Rabbi Judah haNasi. A rich man called Bonias ‘sent Rabbi a measure of artichokes from Nawsah, and Rabbi estimated it at two hundred and seventeen eggs.’ The eggs here are a measure of volume: clearly there were quite a lot of artichokes. ‘Nawsah’ may refer to a settlement on an island in the Euphrates River outside Babylonia. It was a long way from Galilee where Rabbi lived, and only the rich could afford to pay for the transport of these luxuries. Some way of preserving the artichokes, like keeping them in honey-vinegar as described by Pliny above, must have been used.

43 Midrash Esther Rabba 2.4. Klein 1940 suggested that this may be the first reference to the famous Roman Jewish artichoke dish carciofi alla giudia. (For a recipe see Servi Machlin 1993, 180-181). Unfortunately there is no proof to confirm Klein’s charming suggestion, since, as we have seen, artichokes seem to have been famously popular among the Roman pagan nobility. See also Löw 1924, 409. The question of whether the midrash is to be seen as referring to a Persian situation is beyond the scope of this paper.

44 Tosefta Beitzah [Yom Tov] iii.19 and cf. Bab. Beitzah 34a. ‘Akavit/’aqubit has been identified with tumbleweed, Gundelia Tournefortii, which is a wild edible thistle still eaten in Galilee and Lebanon, and known by its Arabic name, ‘aqub. See Shimda 2005, 236; Hehou 2009, 83-84. ‘Aqub can still be bought in the present-day market in Tiberias in the spring, its price depending on whether the vendor has removed the thorns or left that pleasure to the buyer. Its taste when cooked is not unlike artichoke.

45 Bab. Eruvin 83a (my translation).

46 For the identification of Nawsah see Oppenheimer 1983, 266-267.
Unlike the classical sources, there is no moral condemnation here of artichokes as symbols of conspicuous consumption, and tampering with nature. The rabbis of the Talmudim are generally presented as appreciative of good food, and as seeing feasting as desirable, rather than to be condemned.\(^47\) Eating good food, for example, is one of the recommended ways of celebrating or ‘honouring’ Sabbath and festival.\(^48\) Indeed, Rabbi himself, when looking back nostalgically to the time when the Temple still stood, represented his longing for it in terms of desire for the wonderful foods that would have been available in that now legendary time.\(^49\)

How did Rabbi eat his cucumbers and artichokes? Unfortunately the talmudic literature does not tell us, but there are details in some Roman authors which may give us some idea of the possibilities. We have already cited Rabbi’s contemporary, the medical writer Galen, who visited Syria and other parts of the Near East. He sometimes describes methods of cooking similar to those found in the talmudic literature.\(^50\) We saw that Galen recommends eating artichokes fried, or boiled with the addition of coriander, garum and oil. Athenaeus tells us artichokes must be well-seasoned, or they will be inedible. The fourth-century Roman cookery book attributed to Apicius recommends serving artichokes with liquamen and oil, and either chopped boiled egg; or cumin and pepper; or pounded green herbs with pepper and honey.\(^51\)

When it comes to cucumbers, Galen considers them indigestible, and recommends avoiding them. Athenaeus also discusses the digestibility of cucumbers, and notes that stewing them makes them slightly diuretic.\(^52\) Apicus’ ‘cucumeres rasos,’ the shaved or scraped cucumbers already mentioned earlier, were cooked in liquamen or oenogarum,\(^53\) or in vinegar together with honey, herbs and spices, or cooked with brains in an egg sauce.\(^54\) It is also interesting

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\(^47\) This point about the generally positive attitude of the rabbis (in this case the Babylonian rabbis) to the good things in life is made by Gafni 1990 130 citing Beer 1975. But having made his point, Gafni hedges here, warning against taking a series of anecdotes from different periods as evidence. However, we should note that this picture is consistent over both Palestinian and Babylonian sources, and if we compare it to, say, the attitudes of early Christian writers or Philo, we see that this trend is absent there. See Weingarten 2005a.

\(^48\) For a discussion of the rabbinical requirement in both Bavli and Yerushalmi to honour the Sabbath by eating good food, see Cohen 2012, 33-38.

\(^49\) Midrash Lamentations Rabbah iii, 6/17.

\(^50\) See e.g., Weingarten 2007, 274-276.

\(^51\) Apic. 3.6.

\(^52\) Ath. 3.74c.

\(^53\) Garum (above n.36) and wine sauce.

\(^54\) Apic. 3.6.1: cucumeres rasos; 3.6.2: aliter cucumeres rasos.
to note the presence of snake melons in a glass jar with liquid on a wall-painting at Pompeii, perhaps indicating that these ‘cucumbers’ were sometimes pickled.\textsuperscript{55}

I would like to add one final, tentative suggestion for further consideration and study. ‘Cucumbers’ and artichokes appear in the Graeco-Roman literature as extremely desirable foods, suitable for the tables of the Emperor himself. Costly efforts were made to get hold of them. However, according to Pliny, turning mere vegetables into luxury foods, cultivating them artificially, transporting them for long distances and eating them out of season are perversions of the natural order and a shameful display of conspicuous consumption.\textsuperscript{56} For him, \textit{natura}, the world, the work of nature and nature herself, is a god, so that changing it is tantamount to impiety. The extent of the Romanisation of the eating habits of the upper echelons of Palestinian Jewish society is apparent from those attributed to Rabbi Judah haNasi. We might wonder how far Jews also shared Pliny’s cultural attitudes towards food and its conspicuous consumption. For the rabbis, the world is created by God and given to man, ‘to work it and to keep it.’\textsuperscript{57} Although God gave the laws of \textit{kilayim}, forbidding specific kinds of interference with the created world, outside these particular cultivation laws, the rabbis do not appear to see anything wrong in human manipulations of time and space which result in good and enjoyable food. Thus they report the use of these desirable cucumbers and artichokes, grown out of season or brought from afar to Rabbi’s table, as a means of conveying his elevated status. They appear to be siding with the powerful, self-indulgent emperors, rather than the attitudes of Pliny’s moralising aristocracy. How far this picture may be seen as representative of either the ancient Roman or the ancient Jewish world needs to be elucidated.

\textsuperscript{55} De Caro 2001 p. 70, pl. 47; Ercolano, Casa dei Cervi (IV, 21). I am grateful to Harry Paris for pointing this out to me.

\textsuperscript{56} NH ii,1: Beagon 1992. 27. See also Wilkins & Hill 2006, on morally loaded Graeco-Roman criticisms of luxurious dining, especially chapter 7: Food in ancient thought.

\textsuperscript{57} Genesis 2.15.
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Kraus 1910

Leon 1926

Lieberman 1955

Löw 1924

Murphy 2004

Oppenheimer 1983

Oppenheimer 2007

Paris 2011

Paris & Janick 2008a

Paris & Janick 2008b

Rabinowitz 1939

Rosenblum 2010

Syme 1989

Servi Machlin 1993

Shimda 2005

Weingarten 2005a

Weingarten 2005b

Weingarten 2005c

Weingarten 2007

Weingarten 2009

Wilkins & Hill 2006

Wright 2009

Zohary & Hoff 2000