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Ritual Objects for the Feast of Sukkot:
Theoretical Analysis of the Talmudic Prescriptions and Some of their Ethnographical Achievements in the Balkans

Abstract: Can we think of the artifact as an integral part of an anthropology of life as it has developed in the wake of the anthropology of nature founded by Philippe Descola? Judaism clearly fits within this perspective since a vast body of normative texts, notably the Babylonian Talmud, defines and discusses the *jewishness of artifacts* – whether ritual or everyday – by endeavoring to determine their *correct* position on a graduated scale ranging from *nature* to *artifice*, understood here as *emic* categories. This article aims to support this reflection by studying two ritual objects related to the festival of Sukkot: the *skhakh*, the roof of the *sukka* hut, and the *lulav*, the bouquet of the four species. As we shall see, the making of the ritual object according to specific rules shows us its place in the encounter with the supernatural, the goal towards which any ritual device aspires. After a theoretical analysis of the Talmudic prescriptions, we will look at some of the practical ways in which the Sukkot hut can be documented photographically in the Balkans, in the broadest sense of the term. We will present examples from Greece, Romania and Bulgaria.

Keywords: rabbinic Judaism, ritual object, anthropology, nature, artifice, Sukkot, lulav, skhakh, Descola.

> 'The artifact is the best messenger of the supernatural: there is easily in the artifact both a perfection and an absence of origin, a closure and a brilliance, a transformation of life into matter (matter is much more magical than life), and to say the least a silence that belongs to the order of the marvelous.'[1]

According to Barthes, the artifact can or must be seen as 'the transformation of life into matter': rabbinic Judaism offers us the best illustration of this representation. Our article aims to show the ontological issues at stake when studying the technological halachic protocol suited for the ritual artifacts of the

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[1]   R. Barthes, *Mythologiques* (Paris: Seuil, 1957), 140. I am grateful to Laura Cotteril for the English revision of the text.

Sukkot festival.[2] While the history of the feast of Sukkot has been the subject of numerous studies[3], none has examined the taxonomic presuppositions of the ritual prescriptions.

Can we think of the artifact as an integral part of an anthropology of life as it has developed in the wake of the anthropology of nature founded by Philippe Descola?[4] Judaism clearly fits within this perspective since it provides comparative research with a theory of objects in due form. A vast body of normative texts, notably the Babylonian Talmud, defines and discusses the *jewishness of artifacts* – whether ritual or everyday – by endeavoring to determine their *correct* position on a graduated scale ranging from *nature* to *artifice*, understood here as *emic* categories. The rabbis constantly circumscribe the *appropriateness*

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[2]   The symbolism of the feast, in the First and the Second Temple period as well as in the rabbinic period, is the subject of several explanatory hypotheses. Historiography associates the origin of the festival either with the ritual of cosmic renewal and enthronement of YHWH, or with the renewal of the covenant. In the first case, the mythical substratum is the creation and cyclical regeneration of the world, the ritual paradigm of which is the Babylonian New Year's festival, *akitu*. This hypothesis is not based on sources that explicitly attest to this, but on a reconstitution based on the biblical psalms seen as residues of ritual texts. It would thus be a festival of the autumn equinox marking the end of the agricultural cycle and celebrating the harvest of the year as well as the request for rain for the year to come. Renewal of time, nature and the cosmos are thus joined in the annual rite of royal renewal. The second explanatory hypothesis associates the feast of Sukkot with the myth of the exodus and the soteriological attributes of God. The ritual would in this case be that of the renewal of the covenant and the constitution not of the cosmos but of the chosen people, no longer a cosmogony but an ethnogony.

[3]   H. Ulfgard, *The Story of Sukkot: The Setting, Shaping, and Sequel of the Biblical Feast of Tabernacles* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998), K. W. Weyde, *The Appointed Festivals of YHWH. The Festival Calendar in Leviticus 23 and the Sukkôt Festival in Other Biblical Texts* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), N. Ayali-Darshan, "The Seventy Bulls Sacrificed at Sukkot (Num 29:12–34) in Light of a Ritual Text from Emar (Emar 6,373)", *Vetus Testamentum* 65 (2015), 9–19, P. Piwowarczyk, "The Jewish festival of Sukkot in the eyes of the pagan authors", *Scripta Classica* 7 (2010), 63–72, J. Rubenstein, *The History of Sukkot in the Second Temple and Rabbinic Periods* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995). For an ethnographic approach see G. Hasan-Rokem, "Material mobility versus concentric cosmology in the Sukkah: the house of the wandering jew or a ubiquitous temple?", *Things* (2012), 153–179.

[4]   This comparison has already been made by one of Descola's students: P. Pitrou, "Êtres vivants/artefacts, processus vitaux/processus techniques: remarques à propos d'un cadran analytique". In *Les actes de colloques du musée du Quai Branly Jacques Chirac* [En ligne], 6, 2016, online 20 January 2016, accessed 20 December 2021. The notion of anthropology of life is coined by Pitrou. In our article, Descola's anthropology of nature (*Par-delà nature et culture* (Paris: Gallimard 2005) serves as a framework for reflection and Pitrou's anthropology of life as a corollary.

(*kashrut*) of various objects[5] for the fulfillment of the commandments, the passage from one sample to another within the same class, or the passage from one class to another. Doing so, they reveal the way in which both 'natural things' and man's transformative action and the result of that action are conceived.

This article aims to support this reflection by studying two ritual objects related to the festival of Sukkot: the *skhakh*, the roof of the *sukka* hut, and the *lulav*, the bouquet of the four species. As we shall see, the making of the ritual object according to specific rules shows us its place in the encounter with the supernatural, the goal towards which any ritual device aspires.

The choice of basing our reflection on the analysis of the conditions of being of a ritual artifact is motivated, on the one hand, by the state of the documentation, since the major part of the talmudic evidence pertaining to our topic concern non-ordinary objects, namely those which are not part of everyday use. In particular, objects related to the Jewish holidays are at the centre of legislative debates on their manufacture. Although everyday objects are not absent from rabbinic texts, they are not discussed from the point of view of manufacture, but from the point of view of the transmission of impurity or of their function. On the other hand, Rabbinic Judaism makes distinctions that allow us to avoid a debate on the relevance of the terms 'artifact', 'ritual' and 'ritual artifact'.[6] The rabbis themselves make these categorical distinctions, and their texts appear to be almost a structuralism *avant la lettre*. Two terms designate the notion of object/artifact: The first, *kli*, probably derives from the root *k.w.l.*, which designates the 'whole' or 'completeness'. It is the generic term for 'object'/'artifact' in the rabbinic sense of a thing made with unambiguous human 'intention' (*kavvana*) for a specific purpose. Any misuse or indecision around the intention for its manufacture

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[5]   See on this subject E. Hirsch, "Identity in Talmud", *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 23 (1999), 166–180.

[6]   The same observation is made by Bernier-Farella and Patéra: "Une brève enquête bibliométrique montre que l'expression "objet rituel" est rarement employée pour aborder le concept lui-même. La rareté du terme dans les titres scientifiques reflète la rareté des approches globales du phénomène dans un contexte donné, l'écrasante majorité des études prenant la forme de monographies attachées à une catégorie précise d'objets supposés intervenir dans le rite." H. Bernier-Farella, I. Patéra, "Avant-propos du dossier L'objet rituel. Concepts et méthodes croisés", *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 231 (2014), 531. On this same subject, see in the same issue: G. Casas, "Les statues vivent aussi. Théorie néoplatonicienne de l'objet rituel", 663–679 ; C. Soussen, "Les objets rituels des Juifs à la fin du Moyen Âge, catalyseurs des sentiments antijuifs ou fédérateurs des identités?", 681–698. See also: J. Svenbro, "Arraisonner la divinité ? Limites religieuses de la pensée technique". In *Dossier « Tekhnai/artes »* (Paris-Athens: Éditions de l'EHESS, 2007); J.-P. Albert, A. Kedzierska-Manzon, "Des objets-signes aux objets-sujets", *Dossier 'La force des objets. Matières à expériences'*, *Archives de sciences sociales des religions* 174 (2016), 13–25.

disqualifies the *kli* as a *kli*. The quality of *kli*, 'object'/'artifact', is important in determining the pure or impure nature of the thing as some contract impurity and others do not. In concrete terms, *kli* can refer to dishes, weapons, clothing, musical instruments, furniture, agricultural utensils, etc. It is also the biblical term for 'Temple utensils' (e.g., Exodus 25.9), i.e. all artifacts used in sacrifice and worship. The laws of purity governing the artifact, *kli*, are central to the eponymous tractate of the Mishna, Kelim. (Note the importance of the notion of use or function for which a *kli*-artifact is intended in the process of identifying and classifying artifacts). This explains why the rabbis use a second word to designate the notion of 'artifact', namely the term *tašmiš*, derived from the root *š.m.š.*, 'to use': the 'artifact' exists as such only with a pre-determined usage. It is 'instrumental' in a predefined sense. The use of the two terms is interchangeable. Both *kli* and *tašmiš* refer to both ritual and everyday artifacts. Even in a religion such as Judaism, which codifies almost every gesture of the individual and inscribes it in a system of thought where cosmic order is maintained following the commandments, it is possible to distinguish between a ritual practice properly speaking and a codified daily practice. For the purposes of our article, let us start from the formal distinction that the rabbis make between ritual objects charged with sacredness and ritual objects enabling the fulfillment of a commandment. We find this distinction in a *baraita* mentioned in tractate Megillah 26b:

תָּנוּ רַבָּנַן: תַּשְׁמִישֵׁי מִצְוָה — נִזְרָקִין. תַּשְׁמִישֵׁי קְדוּשָׁה — נִגְנָזִין. וְאֵלּוּ הֵן תַּשְׁמִישֵׁי
מִצְוָה: סוּכָּה, לוּלָב, שׁוֹפָר, צִיצִית. וְאֵלּוּ הֵן תַּשְׁמִישֵׁי קְדוּשָׁה: דְּלוֹסְקְמֵי סְפָרִים,
תְּפִילִין וּמְזוּזוֹת, וְתִיק שֶׁל סֵפֶר תּוֹרָה, וְנַרְתִּיק שֶׁל תְּפִילִין וּרְצוּעוֹתֵיהֶן.

The sages taught: objects used for a commandment may be thrown away, sacred objects must be concealed. The objects for the commandments are: the *sukka*, the *lulav*, the *šofar*, the *şişit*, The sacred objects are: the book boxes, the *tefillin*, the *mezuzot*, the garment for the Torah book, the receptacle for the *tefillin* and its straps.

Both the bouquet, *lulav*, and the hut, *sukka*, are explicitly mentioned in the category of ritual artifacts that are indispensable for the fulfilment of the commandments and yet lack their own sacredness. Such an object can be characterized, on the other hand, as 'appropriate', *kašer*, or 'disqualified', *pasul*. We therefore operate from the outset with *emic* categories that we will complete by using a comparative approach to link them with the *etic* categories of anthropology.[7] In this last perspective, the choice of the ritual object is also a conceptual choice. It is quite legitimate to inquire which criteria define a ritual object and to try and establish if these criteria obey a specific ontological regime. What is it about its *constitution that* makes it *appropriate* to the *function*? In other words,

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7   On the distinction between 'holy objects' and 'accessories of holiness' from the perspective of the museum curator, see V. Greene, "Accessories of Holiness: Defining Jewish Sacred Objects", *Journal of the American Institute for Conservation* 31 (2013), 31–39.

we will question the *quiddity of* the ritual object and its *ideal* position between nature and artifice.

The objects selected for analysis, the *skhakh* and the *lulav*, both consist of plant material. However, they do not converge in terms of the quality, quantity nor exclusivity of this material. At first glance, one might conclude that the rabbis do not approach the making of *skhakh* and *lulav* in the same way. A more careful analysis, however, going beyond a literal reading of the talmudic prescriptions, reveals some of the rabbinic concepts that operate in both cases and even beyond these particular devices.

Elsewhere, we have devoted a detailed textual examination of the talmudic prescriptions concerning the making of the *skhakh*[8], respectively the *lulav*.[9] The present article will therefore not be descriptive but conceptual.

Before proceeding with this conceptual analysis, we feel it is important to note two methodological issues that characterize our corpus of analysis, as well as all talmudic extracts. First, it is necessary to note the composite character of the Talmud and more precisely the chronological stratigraphy that this text itself highlights. There is perhaps no better illustration of the term *textus*, as 'fabric of words', than the talmudic page. The Talmud consists, on the one hand, of the quotation of the Mishna, conventionally written around 200 BCE, and, on the other hand, its commentary by the Gemara, itself made up of a succession of rabbinic voices spanning several centuries, from the 3rd to the 7th/8th. In questioning the making of the *skhakh* and the *lulav*, we must take into account this stratigraphy of text which amounts to a stratigraphy of meaning. Indeed, the point of view expressed by the *tannaim*, author-editors of the Mishna, is not identical to that of the *amoraim*, author-editors of the Gemara. History and geography separate them. The only way, in our opinion, to get around this difficulty is to analyze separately the two discourses without forgetting to note the links which, in the Talmud, connect a *lemma* to its *commentary*. This difficulty can thus be transformed into an asset insofar as the analysis of this type of text makes it possible to draw the dynamics of the notion of ritual object, its evolution in time and space between Roman Palestine and Sassanid Babylonia. The second methodological difficulty lies in the dialogical character of the Gemara, sometimes even of the Mishna. The reading of the Talmud is that of a succession of questions and arguments and rarely that of conclusions. The multiplicity of points of view is one of the most salient features of rabbinic production. 'For what reason?', 'Is this really so?', 'To whom do we attribute this statement?'

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[8]   The *skhakh* is the subject of a separate chapter in our book *L'idée de nature chez les rabbins antiques. Eléments d'anthropologie historique* (Leuven: Peeters, 2024).

[9]   The making of the *lulav* is analysed in detail in our article "L'objet rituel 'par-delà nature et culture': le *lulav* dans le Talmud de Babylone", *Métis* (2022), 83–112, part of the thematic dossier "Nature/natures" that we coordinated.

are some of the recurrent formulas in the Gemara. On the other hand, one can also read statements such as: 'Rabbi So-and-so says this and Rabbi So-and-so that', 'the school of Shammai ruled this way and the school of Hillel that way', 'the matter remains unresolved', '*teiqo*', a word that indicates the situation where a particular argument remains unresolved, with no obvious winners or losers. Under these conditions, what can the historian retain?

In the recurrent and almost systematic absence of conclusions, how can we know what is actually happening in a society? What remains and what is rejected? If, in the following centuries, the collections of *halakhah* will establish and fix the different traditions of practice, as far as the so-called talmudic period is concerned, parallel sources are lacking. Nevertheless, rabbinic dialogue is not totally silent for the historian. Asking this question more than another, addressing this aspect more than another, is informative. The fault lines and uncertainties, the areas and dimensions in which a society is in search of evidence and practical reference points are thus revealed. The hypotheses formulated unfold before our eyes the realm of the plausible. The arguments put forward by each rabbi in support of their ideas and points of view are also a wealth of information about what is evidence in a given situation. Thus, unlike other more enunciative bodies of work, the interest of this corpus lies in the way it follows the path of thought.

The Talmud is a difficult corpus for the positivist historian to grasp, but it is a privileged subject for the anthropological historian. Dialogism favours the constitution of conceptual binomials. As we have already pointed out, the Talmud is almost structuralist. It itself states oppositions that, in other cultures, remain implicit. High-low, right-left, raw-cooked, ripe-green, symmetrical-asymmetrical, round-square and the list could go on. The historian who is interested in anthropology must therefore look further, or rather deeper, because to limit himself to noting these oppositions would be to remain on the surface of things, whereas depth can be found in the analysis of the sometimes very sophisticated demonstrations of the rabbis. Their clues and proofs, their syllogisms and associations of ideas provide us with the main material for our reflection on the status of the ritual object within an analogical ontology[10] and as the result of a relation defined as a relation of production.

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[10] We use here the ontological typology as defined by Philippe Descola. Descola conceives four types of ontology as different associations between interiority and physicality. This combinatory is then reducible to the interplay of identity and relation. Making use of those principles the humans establish resemblances and differences between themselves and the rest of the beings. The four ontologies are: animism (similar interiorities and dissimilar physicalities), totemism (similar interiorities and similar physicalities), naturalism (dissimilar interiorities and similar physicalities), analogism (dissimilar interiorities and dissimilar physicalities). See Descola, *Par delà nature et culture*, chap. 'Les dispositions de l'être', 227–400.

The kosher technology of the skhakh and its concepts

The feast of *Sukkot* is mentioned in the Bible and in the Second Temple literature as one of the three great pilgrimage feasts to the Temple in Jerusalem; it is, during the whole Antiquity, the main Jewish holy day, simply referred to by the word *ḥag*, 'feast'. It involves several rites: the procession with willow branches (ʿarava), libations (*simḥat bet ha-šoʾeva*), the handling of the four essences bouquet (*lulav*), the gathering at the Temple (*haqhel*), the residence in booths, *sukkot*. The huts are first mentioned in the Code of Holiness, Leviticus 23.43, but without describing how they should be built. The question of the roof of the hut, the *skhakh*, which is of interest here, becomes a central topic in rabbinic literature.

For the rabbis, the *skhakh* represents the essential element of a hut and concentrates in it the symbolism of the whole festival. The texts repeatedly state that the purpose of the hut is to produce a shadow larger than the area swept by the sunlight (7b, 8b, 9b). As early as the schools of Shammai and Hillel, the *skhakh* became a consensus 'concept'. The rabbinic discussions do not question its relevance, i.e. the fact that the *skhakh* is to be understood as distinct from the walls of the *sukka* and that it represents the quintessence of the commandment to build a hut. But while the concept is not questioned, many ritual constraints are formulated. The first chapter of the Sukka treatise discusses the many aspects related to the dimensions of the *skhakh*, the permitted materials and the exceptions to the rule.

The *skhakh* must obey a threefold constraint: its constituent elements must 'grow from the earth', they must 'not transmit impurity'[11] and the totality of the structure must correspond to the 'unequivocal intention'[12] of an individual to build a *skhakh*.

Both a reserve of extra-human living principle and an extension of the human personality, it is only under these two conditions that the *skhakh* as a ritual object acquires its own identity and can participate in the accomplishment

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[11] 'This is the general rule: anything that receives ritual impurity or does not grow on the ground, may not use it as *skhakh*. And anything that does not receive ritual impurity and grows on the ground (*giddulo min ha-ʾaretz*), one may use as *skhakh*.' (Sukka 11a)

The notion of *giddul* or *gedila* implies the idea of natural development, without human intervention. Often it refers to the growth of plants, but the term does not seem to be restricted to the plant realm and its nourishing link with the earth. The tannaitic texts attest to this understanding, which seems to be shared. As for the principle stated in mishna Sukka 1.4, the notion of the natural element required for the construction of the *skhakh* becomes important.

[12] Mishna 1.4 and Sukka 11a ff.

of the rite. A detailed analysis of the rules governing the making of the 'roof of the hut' reveals three important aspects:

a)　　The object/non-object dichotomy

Attachment to the ground indicates the zero degree of 'non-artifact': it attests to the non-'objectual' character of that which, when manipulated by man for a ritual function, becomes an object, but without entirely losing its natural character. However, the break must be made in order to create a pure object that is *exclusively* a ritual object.

The action of 'cutting'[13] is therefore highly significant: the radical nature of this act is reinforced by the fact that what has been cut is 'reserved'[14] for seven days in a symbolic, but also effective, process of programmed de-naturalisation. Following this process, one gets the assurance that the cut material will serve a precise and exclusive purpose – the fabrication of the ritual *skhakh*.

On the other hand, it is understood that the raw material *on the way to* be transformed into an artifact, does not entirely abolish its earthly originating roots, since something absolutely artificial – insofar as such a thing could exist – would not be acceptable. It thus becomes clear that the *skhakh* ritual object must be anything but a natural thing, but nonetheless something that *will have been natural*. It also means that ritual cannot be accomplished by the random grace of a fortunate configuration of things and in the absence of an explicit intention. Finally, the structure is expected to perform the function it has been assigned.

b)　　The structure/function dichotomy

Things that 'grow out of the ground' are either in the form of oblong woody elements (branches, shoots, stems) or in the form of foliage (*yeraqot*). The former are problematic since they cannot in fact be handled one by one but must be gathered into bundles; the latter are also problematic because of their inherently perishable and ephemeral nature.

In Judaism, the binding, ʾ*eged*, *ḥibbur*, is the mark that a 'thing' has been made: but does such a 'thing' also constitutes an 'artifact' (*kli*)? Or should it still be considered as 'raw material'? An accidental or purposeful unbinding would return the bound elements to their original state and the 'artifact' would no longer be an 'artifact'.

The Gemara dwells on the act of 'cutting' the branches *after* lowering them (Mishna Sukka 1.4, Sukka 11a): 'The *sukka* is not valid if one bent over it the vine, pumpkin or ivy and covered them with branches; if the *sikukh* was more

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[13]　Mishna 1.4 and Sukka 11a ff.
[14]　Mishna 1.4 and Sukka 11a ff.

abundant than them or if one cut them, it is lawful.' The quantitative reflection on proportions is complemented by a qualitative reflection on human intervention and its consequences. Can any of the roof's components be *repaired*? The fact that the shoots were only *cut off* at a later stage, *after* having been lowered, indicates that they were originally defective in the sense that they did not meet the requirements of the *kašer*, 'regular', *skhakh*. A whole controversy ensues as to whether cutting the branches makes the *sukka* valid ('cutting is *making* them') or whether things that were originally invalid remain invalid forever.[15] What is the chronological starting point of the roof fabrication? The principle would be that, according to the commandment 'You shall make *sukkot*' (Deuteronomy 16.13), all elements are valid 'from the beginning' and not 'repaired'.[16] This is indeed what the Gemara seems to agree with: 'It is the unanimous opinion that cutting down the branches is not enough to validate (the *skhakh*)' (Sukka 11b). In other words, the branches must first be cut and therefore detached from the soil that nurtures them, reserved for the making of the *skhakh* and in fact used. To the human actions of lowering oaths and cutting after lowering, Rav adds the 'necessity of stirring' the branches after cutting them.

Finally, the criterion of duration is also necessary for the determination of the essence of an artifact because what is attached, the *bundle*, can only be recognized and certified as such if it lasts a minimum length of time. If a movement, such as transportation, undoes them, their reality as a *bundle* is evanescent: they would no longer be usable and could therefore no longer be held as 'thing'. In order for a thing to be fulfilled as a thing, it therefore needs a minimal time but also a minimal space, thresholds below which the thing cannot be said to be *the* same. This same principle explains why *yeraqot*, the 'foliage', is not suitable for the composition of a *skhakh*: drying too quickly, they disappear, leaving the void behind.

c)   The mixture/mechanism dichotomy

The 'roof of the hut' has a hybrid character: it is an artifact but not a substance, insofar as it is composed of regular material (*skhakh kašer*), non-regular material (*skhakh pasul*) as well as intermediate spaces. Therefore, the question of mixing comes up as a leitmotif. The way to solve this question of artifact identity consists, for the rabbis, in postulating that the majority nature cancels the minority nature and that the majority/minority ratio must be respected. Thus, for example, the lowered branch cancels itself out in the cut branch; the edible part – the fruit which, being perishable, runs the risk of catching ritual impurity – cancels

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[15] See the comparison with the ṣiṣiot (11b).

[16] 'A baraita was taught about the *sukka*: "You shall do" – not about what has been done. And it is concluded that the *sukka* is not valid if one has bent over it the vine, pumpkin or ivy and covered them with cut branches.' (Sukka 11b)

itself out in the waste part; the empty space cancels itself out – under certain conditions – in the full. Let us specify that it is not a question here of a fusion that would give birth to *another* entity or nature, but of a set of heterogeneous and unequal parts that a quantitative type of reasoning refuses to think of as a new emerging being.

The discussion on the *roof of the hut* is thus articulated around three poles: the raw material, the qualified artifact and the fragment of an object. We are witnessing a constant search for definitions and signs that would reveal the validity or invalidity of an artifact, in this case a ritual. This ordering quest reveals a way of conceiving the boundary between the natural and the artifactual, the propensity to establish ideal natures-quiddities and the formulation of the limits within which these quiddities are tolerated to be damaged.

The kosher technology of the lulav and its concepts

Many of the essential details enabling the enactment of the *Sukkot* bouquet commandment are not mentioned in the Bible. The verse that instructs about it is Leviticus 23.40:

וּלְקַחְתֶּם לָכֶם בַּיּוֹם הָרִאשׁוֹן פְּרִי עֵץ הָדָר כַּפֹּת תְּמָרִים וַעֲנַף עֵץ־עָבֹת וְעַרְבֵי־נַחַל וּשְׂמַחְתֶּם
לִפְנֵי יְהֹוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם שִׁבְעַת יָמִים׃

> On the first day you shall take the product of *hadar* trees, branches of palm trees, boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook, and you shall rejoice before YHWH your God seven days.[17]

Several questions arise from this verse: What are the species referred to as 'beautiful trees' and 'bushy trees' respectively? What is the meaning of the redundancy '*you* shall take *for yourselves*'? What ritual gesture should be performed once the bouquet has been 'taken'?

A first step towards clarifying these details can be made by reading the mishnaic legislation. Indeed, in Mishna Sukka 3.1-8, the four species are identified and named: *lulav* (palm, 3.1), *hadas* (myrtle, 3.2), ʿ*arava* (willow, 3.3), ʾ*etrog* (citron, 3.5-8). The Mishna does not discuss these identifications, it is the Gemara that will do so.[18] The Mishna's contribution consists in the establishment

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[17] D. E. S. Stein (ed.), *The Contemporary Torah*, (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2006).

[18] The Mishna is the first text to refer to the 'myrtle', *hadas*, and the 'citron', ʾ*etrog*, and remains the earliest detailed, if late, source on the bouquet ritual. The use of these four species seems to date back to Persian times when the citron, originally from Asia, made its appearance in the land of Israel. The palm tree was cultivated in the region from the

of rules for the use of each species and in particular rules defining which sample is kosher and therefore good for ritual use.

A distinction can be made between generic details applicable to all four species, and specific details for date palm branch, myrtle, willow branch and citron.

The prohibitions common to all four species are the following: a 'stolen' (*gazul*) or 'desiccated' (*yaveš*) specimen; one that would be 'in connection with an ʾašera/'sacred tree' (*šel ʾašera*) or from 'a rogue city' (*me-ʿir ha-nidaḥat*) is not valid (*pasul*). The same prohibition applies to one whose 'end was cut off' (*niqtam roʾšo*) or whose 'leaves were detached' (*nifreṣu ʿalav*). Let us examine each of these prohibitions.

For the *tannaim*, determining the identity of the ritual plant specimen is a constant preoccupation. This identity is sometimes defined explicitly but more often implicitly. The identity is circumscribed first of all in a *relational way* since each plant must be the property of the practitioner. Secondly, the *maintenance of the form* is another criterion stating the quiddity: what crumbles or is damaged, especially in the upper part, does not count. The predominance of leaves in the case of branches and the state of fruit in the case of citron, i.e. their *status over time*, is also taken into account by the *tannaim*. Those plants specimens are assigned a purpose, a function, a finality, by means of enouncing rules and instituting conventions. Although man has no control over the vital processes of non-cultivated plants, he does control the production of ritual artifacts.[19] The marking of the Sukkot bouquet is the detachment from the ground, the attachment of the four species and the statement of rules for the choice of the ritual specimen. These rules do not seek to institute an artifact going beyond the ordinary, neither by its size nor by other morphological characteristics. These rules aim to keep the plant elements as close as possible to their original state once detached from the ground.

ıv[th] century BC. Several studies trace the identification and use of the four species for the Sukkot ritual, drawing on Akkadian, Greek and iconographic sources: D. Langgut, Y. Gadot, O. Lipschitz, ""Fruit of Goodly Trees": The Beginning of Lemon Cultivation in Israel and Its Penetration into Jewish Tradition and Culture", *Beit Mikra. Journal for the Study of the Bible and its World* 59 (2014), 38–55 (Heb.); S. Arieli, ""Pri Etz Hadar" – Fruit of the "Tree of Life"", *Beit Mikra. Journal for the Study of the Bible and its World* 59 (2014), 5–40; R. Ben-sasson, "Botanics and Iconography Images of the *Lulav* and the *Etrog*" *Ars Judaica* 8 (2012), 7–22. The still classic work for the identification of biblical and rabbinical essences is Y. Feliks, *Types of Fruit Trees. Biblical and Rabbinical Plants* (Jerusalem: Rubin Mass Press, 1994) (Heb.).

[19] On the relationship between vital processes and techniques, see *Montrer/occulter. Visibilité et contextes rituels*, ed. Périg Pitrou in collaboration with G. Olivier (Paris : L'Herne « Cahiers d'anthropologie sociale », 2015).

The ritual artifact does not have to be *extra-ordinary*, it just has to be *itself*. The *Amoraim* encompass the thought of the *tannaim* in some respects and differs in others. As is evident from Sukka folios 30a-43b, for the rabbis of the Gemara, quiddity is in a fragile equilibrium as it is constantly threatened by time and transformation. They are therefore more sensitive to signs of decay as well as evolution. Aware of this *fundamental instability* of things, the *amoraim* are also less strict about the *boundaries* that separate them from idolatrous practices and their artifacts. There is also a pronounced taste for the use of *midrash* in problem solving and in stating *halacha*. In contrast, the *amoraim* follow the same pattern, valuing *leaves* and *stems* just as strongly as fruits and flowers, the notion of *attachment*, and an *analytical* conception of artifacts which, in order to exist, must *connect* their constituent parts. Even when it comes to a fruit, the citron, its quiddity, *ṭaʿam*, 'taste, reason', is reduced to that of the rind and it must be kept apart, separate from the leafy branches. Finally, the *amoraim* develop the *tannaitic* notion of beauty, *hadar*, proper to the ritual artifact by instituting aesthetic criteria of symmetry, harmony of form and consistency of matter.

As mentioned previously the Mishna systematically prohibited the use of a stolen sample of palm, myrtle, willow and citron in order to fabricate a kosher *lulav*. Individual ownership of the *lulav* is essential to perform the rite. In folios 39a-41a, Tractate Sukka addresses the ownership debate by questioning the order of priority in situations of superposition and competition of temporal holiness: what is the status of the plants during the sabbatical year, *ševiʿit*? According to the laws of the sabbatical year, the landowner must suspend all agricultural activity. Products that grow without human intervention are declared public property and trade in the products of the year is prohibited. Finally, the products of the sabbatical year must not be destroyed or wasted. The fruits of trees and those from seeds that fell to the ground before the Sabbatical year are allowed as food but must be treated as sanctified food. These regulations can lead to transgressions regarding the making of the *lulav* since the practitioner is required, in most cases, to *purchase* all four species as an unmistakable sign of ownership. The question arises in particular with the *ʾetrog*, the citron, since it is an edible fruit. As for the palm tree, the *Amoraim* debate whether it is merely 'wood' (*ʾeṣim*), an inedible product from which no profit is made, and as such it does not become sacred during the sabbatical year (*qedušat ševiʿit*). This discussion highlights the rabbis' concern about the classification of things and objects and their possible misuse. If such misuse occurs, the status of the object may change as well as its handling.

The *lulav* bouquet is embedded in a set of cultural relationships. By its *freshness*, it must keep the trace of its *link with the environment*; by its *belonging*, it must embody the *link with the practitioner*; by its assigned *function*, it must express *the intention of the practitioner* to make a ritual artifact; by its *species* and

its *integrity*, it must keep its *formal identity* and maintain the quantity of stored substance necessary for the rite.

Anthropology of life, agentivity of ritual artifacts

We have seen how these ritual artifacts acquire their ritual efficacy through compliance with the rules of manufacture. This is what we called a kosher technology. We deduce that the first condition of their effectiveness is their *quiddity*.

Another question is how this quiddity acts and by virtue of what properties and mechanisms does it guarantee ritual action?

The *skhakh* of the hut and the *lulav* do not intervene in the same way in the ritual process and it is questionable whether both manifest their effectiveness in the same type of ritual action.

The *skhakh* should cast a shadow in such a way that when the sun reaches its zenith, the share of the shadow falls mainly within the *sukka*. It is the meaning of the shadow that requires clarification and on this subject the texts are not consensual. Is it a question of reliving the exit from Egypt and experiencing the effective divine protection through the clouds of glory? The practitioner would thus be caught up in the game of *mimesis*, and in this case the ritual would consist of producing the performance of a past drama each year. The intended effect of this ritual is perhaps twofold: both the intellectualisation of historical memory and the emotional experience. It is interesting to also note the effects of its materiality on the human subject: the *skhakh* must allow light to pass through, it must not smell bad, it must not drop leaves, it must allow the experience of sleep and satiety inside the hut. The man should also *know* that the *skhakh* does not transmit impurity.[20] The manner in which the *skhakh* is constituted and manufactured must be the guarantor of these requirements in their entirety.

The *lulav* belongs, at least from a phenomenological point of view, to a different logic. It is not part of a narrative that could be considered a myth, nor does it participate in a dramaturgical recollection device. The *lulav* has to be handled in a certain way and at certain moments of sacred time in order to fulfil a biblical injunction expressed literally by the verb 'to take': the Bible indicates that the practitioner must 'take' the bouquet. When, how and why this taking should be done is up to the rabbis. While fabricating the *sukka* and its *skhakh* means building the scene of the ritual itself and establishing the spatial boundaries of the ritual, the making of the *lulav* has no such function. In rabbinic ritual

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20 The bibliography on the agentivity of objects is quite rich. Let us just mention B. Latour, *Changer de société, refaire de la sociologie* (Paris: Editions la Découverte, 2006); S. Houdart, O. Thiéry (eds.), *Humains, nonhumains. Comment repeupler les sciences sociales?* (Paris: La Découverte, 2011).

this bouquet is 'taken' in hand and 'shaken' at certain points during the recitation of the Hallel, specifically during the verses *Hodu la-šem ki ṭov, ki le-ʿolam ḥasdo* ('Praise God, for He is good, for His grace is everlasting') and *ʾanna ha-šem hošiaʿna* ('By grace, O God, save us, by grace'). The gesture is meant to punctuate the recitation but the time and place allocated to it within the ritual varies: before and after the destruction of the Temple, in Jerusalem or in the diaspora, on the first day only or during the seven days of the festival. The object and the gesture are thus conditioned by the liturgical word, in other words by the sacred temporality. As a result, the competition between the sacredness of the Sabbath and the sacredness of the festival is widely discussed by the rabbis who rule on the pre-eminence of the former (Sukka 42b-43a). The handling of the *lulav* also becomes a gesture reviving the memory of the Temple in the period following its destruction (Sukka 44a).

What are the effects on the practitioner of living in the shadow of the *skhakh* and manipulating the *lulav*? Ritual theories have produced explanations of rites of passage, for example, which in all their diversity are expected to mark the symbolic transformation of the individual, his passage from one class – age, civil status, social status, etc. – to another. Others have looked at sacrifice and commensality or prayer, the purpose of which is to establish communication between the worldly order and the divine order. Still others have studied festivals as the overthrow of the social and cosmic order, the purpose of which is precisely to strengthen it.

Rabbinic Judaism places at the centre the notion of commandment, *miṣva*. It is precisely through the *miṣvot* that the cosmic order is preserved, more precisely the order instituted by the demiurge God and within which man must take his part by simply following the commandments. A first level of explanation would therefore be the need to conform to the divine word in order to preserve the world. But this is not a satisfactory explanation because it is not just a matter of putting into practice a received tradition. Indeed, the rabbis are themselves the originators of a multitude of halachic details and thus assert themselves as producers of *miṣvot*. It is as promoters of normativity that the rabbinic imagination must be interrogated.

For the questions that concern us here, namely the agentivity of ritual objects and the transformative scope of ritual action, we can start from a few scattered indications that can be picked up in some talmudic controverses, indications which the rabbis let slip out almost without being aware and without dwelling on them. We have collected such an indication about the *lulav*. Mishna Sukka 3.8 prohibits the tying together of palm, myrtle and willow using another species that would distort the ritual bouquet by adding a fifth species. The Gemara's commentary at this point is very concerned to prevent a foreign body from coming between the ritual *lulav* and the hand that takes it. Two *amoraim* of

the fourth century, Raba and Rava, discuss and contrast their views. For Raba, contiguity and continuity must be ensured and therefore direct contact between man and the plant is the most important thing. Rava, on the other hand, considers the attachment as non-essential, ornamental, and therefore unfit to make a 'separation' (ḥaṣiṣa) between man and this same plant. With a more approximate conception of quiddity, Rava even thinks that any taking of the bouquet by means of something else does not call into question the validity of the ritual manipulation. For Raba, not only must a fifth species be banned for fear of 'separation', but any intervention in the constituted bouquet is also dangerous. Slipping the palm branch between the myrtle and willow branches, or cutting the palm branch already attached to the other two, may result in the detachment of some leaves and the creation of a material and ontological barrier between the individual and the bouquet. The *amoraim* reveal here the value of contiguity as a vector of continuity. The ritual process is indebted to it, in the same way that the resident in the *sukka* must, in order for his *miṣva* to be valid, sleep under the *skhakh kašer* or in other words, the part of the roof made of regular material. All this evokes the way Lévi-Strauss and, in his wake, Descola, decipher the role of the animal in the device of ritual sacrifice: 'The characteristic feature of a sacrifice is precisely the fact that it establishes a link between two terms initially unconnected, the purpose of the operation being, to cite Lévi-Strauss's definition, ' "to establish a relation, which is not of resemblance, but of contiguity, by means of a series of successive identifications which can be made in both directions […]: either from the sacrificant to the sacrificer, from the sacrificer to the victim, from the sacred victim to the deity; or in the reverse order". Descola completes this explanation: 'it is precisely this decomposition of the victim's attributes, against the background of decomposing all the existing entities into a multitude of elements, that allows it (the victim) to fulfil a connector function through the identification of each of the actors in the rite with at least one of its properties.'[21]

     This passage helps us grasp the ontological logic behind it.[22] The direct contact – established with the *lulav* – or by sympathy – established under the *skhakh* – answers the question of the symbolic effectiveness of these ritual artifacts. The symbolic efficacity consists in establishing a contiguity and, through it, some kind of relationships between distant beings. Thus, for example, spending the night under the *skhakh* is to be interpreted as the sign of an experience of

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[21] Descola, *Par delà nature et culture,* 399, engl. transl. 2013, 229.

[22] Rabbinic Judaism itself modelled its liturgical system on that of the Temple, naming the daily prayers after the different types of sacrifices. Since the work of G. Stroumsa, *La fin du sacrifice. Les mutations religieuses de l'Antiquité tardive* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2005), Late Antiquity corresponds to the 'end of the sacrifice' and an anthropological mutation occurs at this time. This theory should be widely revised because the rabbinic ontology, of an analogist type, is in continuity with that of the preceding eras.

temporal regression, of a return *illo tempore*, and not only that of the recollection of a historical event.

The substance and structure of the ritual artifacts that mediate this symbolic efficacy are not neutral. Let us begin by recalling the parallels made by the rabbis between the sacrificial animal and *lulav* on the one hand, and the *skhakh* on the other. The anonymous editor of the Gemara makes Rabbi Yohanan's opinion explicit: 'The *sukka* can be compared to the *ḥagiga*' (Sukka 11b) where the word *ḥagiga* means the sacrifice brought on pilgrimage festivals and modelled on the peace sacrifices. And the text continues: 'Just as (the animal for) the *ḥagiga* is a thing not susceptible to impurity and grows on the earth, so (the roof of) the *sukka* is a thing not susceptible to impurity and grows on the earth' (Sukka 11b). Obviously, it is not a question of making up the *skhakh* using 'living things' – *baʿaley ḥayim* – and the author of the Gemara is quick to make this clear in order to remove any misunderstanding since he directs the discussion towards the use of plant stuff 'from the barn and the press'. The rabbis like to alternate levels of meaning by moving from a literal to a metaphorical reading and back again; this is their characteristic exegetical play. The comparison attributed to Rabbi Yohanan reveals the commonality between the roof of the hut and the sacrificial animal, namely their connection to the earth, *qarqaʿ*: the material of the roof, like the animal itself, 'grows from the earth' (*giddulo min ha-ʾareṣ*). The earth provides the vital nourishing flow for animals and plants alike.

The ritual artifact of interest here, the *skhakh*, must be the receptacle of this vital flow and at the same time, as other rabbinic discussions tell us, *cut off* from its source. In this it resembles the *lulav* whose first requirement is that each of its component species be fresh (*lo ʾ yaveš*). The bouquet must store vital flow during the seven days of the festival and only then will its ritual effectiveness be assured. Moreover, on several occasions we have noted terminological similarities between the way of describing the plant, in this case the species of the *lulav*, and the way of describing the sacrificial animal, the animal fit for consumption and the one with defects. Speaking of the citron, Mishna Sukka 3.6, specifies the defects that invalidate it:

עָלְתָה חֲזָזִית עַל רֻבּוֹ, נִטְּלָה פִּטָמָתוֹ, נִקְלַף, נִסְדַּק, נִקַּב וְחָסַר כָּל שֶׁהוּא, פָּסוּל.
עָלְתָה חֲזָזִית עַל מְעוּטוֹ, נִטַּל עֻקְצוֹ, נִקַּב וְלֹא חָסַר כָּל שֶׁהוּא, כָּשֵׁר. אֶתְרוֹג הַכּוּשִׁי, פָּסוּל.
וְהַיָרוֹק כְּכַרְתִי
רַבִּי מֵאִיר מַכְשִׁיר
וְרַבִּי יְהוּדָה פּוֹסֵל

If it has scabs covering most of it, if its protuberance has been removed, if it has been peeled, split or pierced and if anything is missing, it is unfit.

If only a minor part of it is scabbed over, if its stalk has been removed or if it has been pierced but nothing is missing, it is valid.

A coushite/black citron is unfit. The leek-green one: Rabbi Meir considers it valid and Rabbi Yehuda²³ considers it improper.

The resemblance is striking with the affections which, by touching the skin of animals, make them unfit for sacrifice or consumption. The vocabulary is common for plants and for animals, sometimes also for men: the adjective 'peeled' designates an animal forbidden because it has lost its skin (Hullin 55b), 'split' the one whose windpipe is split (Hullin 45a), 'pierced' the one whose meninx is holed (Hullin 42a); the animal with a *ḥazazit*-like rash is also forbidden (Mishna Bekhorot 6.12); the term *piṭma*, translated here as 'protuberance', refers to the area around the nipple, the 'peduncle', *ʿuqaṣ*, refers to the spine or hip with the tail of a sacrificial animal (Mishna Tamid 3.1, Hullin 93a), the term *kuši* means 'from the land of Kuš/Ethiopia' but also an abnormally dark colour hue (Mishna Bekhorot 7.6, Berakhot 58b).²⁴

The same parallelism can be observed in the malformations of the palm branch. In order to be valid, it must fall within the norms of 'nature', in other words, the way its species was created (*bryʾiateia*, Sukka 32a). The phrase chosen to denote the opposite of 'natural' is *baʿal mum*. Incidentally, this is what Rav Papa calls the palm tree with asymmetrical branches, attesting to the analogy with the animal of sacrifice forbidden because of its physical defects.

The *skhakh* and the *lulav*, made of vegetable matter, are the intermediaries of communication with divinity. In the case of sacrifice, the active principle is blood, 'which is life', says Leviticus, the same blood that must be released when the animal is sacrificed. In the case of the ritual artifacts analysed here, there is no question of any destruction, their vital flow must remain intact. The chain of juxtaposition and communication is reversed. Lévi-Strauss already questioned the necessity of killing the sacrificial victim and answered this question. The destruction of the victim by humans creates a void in the continuity instituted between the existing entities and provokes in the recipient of the sacrifice, the divinity in our case, the desire to re-establish contact by responding favourably to men.²⁵ The *skhakh* and the *lulav* must, on the contrary, hold, while keeping the trace of their fabrication, of their objectal character. The *skhakh* must embody impermanence – not a tree and not a house; it must also be the manifestation of an unequivocal intention of the man to make it as a ritual artifact. The *lulav* must also share a characteristic with the practitioner: it must belong to him, be

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²³ Rabbi Yehuda and Rabbi Meir: *tannaim*, ca. 135–170.

²⁴ See Berakhot 58b: 'Whoever saw a person with abnormally black skin, a person with abnormally red skin, a person with abnormally white skin [*lavkan*], a person with abnormally tall and thin skin, a dwarf, or a person with warts [*darnikos*], recites: Blessed... *Who makes creatures different.*'

²⁵ C. Lévi-Strauss, *La Pensée sauvage* (Paris: Plon, 1962), 297–298.

his property as a substance and as an object, by virtue of its telluric origin – the plot of origin – and by virtue of its manufacture. These characteristics place these ritual objects halfway between nature and artifice: they are torn from the earth's vital flow and inserted into man's artificial network.

Not only must the flow of life be maintained throughout the festival of *Sukkot*, but the amount of ritual material must fall within a minimum and maximum threshold.

The manufacture of *skhakh* is a mixture of regular *skhakh*, non-regular *skhakh* and empty spaces. Oblong elements such as *šipudin*/'spits' and slats are allowed, provided they are supplemented, *in equal parts*, by 'regular *skhakh*'. The question of measurement is a major concern for the *amoraim*. Therefore, the question remains on how to establish the width of the intermediate space in order to meet the constraint of a *minimum* mixture in equal proportions? The space between the slats, which is intended to be filled with 'regular kosher *skhakh*', can be measured *approximately* – according to Rav Houna – but also *precisely* – as the anonymous writer indicates (Sukka 15a). For Rav Ammi, the space for the regular kosher *skhakh* must be larger and must occupy most of the roof. For Rava, on the other hand, this is not really necessary, since additional width in the *skhakh* compensates for a smaller length and vice versa. The gemara also questions the thresholds at which an empty space and a nonregular roof each invalidate a *sukka*, and especially whether the two natures can add up. Can the natures 'add up' (*miṣtarfim*) and participate together in the validation or invalidation of a *sukka*? If the invalidation threshold for an empty space is three palms and that of the *skhakh pasul* is four palms, can the measure of one be considered to complement the measure of the other and can they form a new blocking entity?

The number of branches of each species making up the lulav is also discussed. In folio 34b the Talmud quotes the Sukka Mishna 3.4 which tells us the quantities required for each of the four species. This Mishna reports a diversity of opinions.

רַבִּי יִשְׁמָעֵאל אוֹמֵר, שְׁלֹשָׁה הֲדַסִּים וּשְׁתֵּי עֲרָבוֹת, לוּלָב אֶחָד וְאֶתְרוֹג אֶחָד, אֲפִלּוּ שְׁנַיִם קְטוּמִים וְאֶחָד אֵינוֹ קָטוּם
רַבִּי טַרְפוֹן אוֹמֵר אֲפִלּוּ שְׁלָשְׁתָּן קְטוּמִים
רַבִּי עֲקִיבָא אוֹמֵר, כְּשֵׁם שֶׁלּוּלָב אֶחָד וְאֶתְרוֹג אֶחָד, כָּךְ הֲדַס אֶחָד וַעֲרָבָה אֶחָת .

Rabbi Ishmael[26] says: 'Three myrtles, two willows, a palm tree and a citron, even two myrtles with broken ends and one not broken'. Rabbi Tarfon[27] says: 'Even three

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[26] *Tanna*, IIIe generation, ca. 80-110.

[27] *Tanna*, IIIe generation, ca. 80-110.

myrtles with broken ends'. Rabbi Akiba said, 'Just as one palm tree and one citron tree are needed, so are one myrtle and one willow.'

The question of the amount of material required for the rite is raised in connection with the citron. The minimum size of the fruit is the equivalent of a nut for Rabbi Meir and the equivalent of an egg for Rabbi Yehuda. These two quantitative criteria can also be seen as thresholds for the visibility of the citron. This is also the maximum size allowed for the transport of stones on shabbat. It can therefore be said that an object becomes visible, and therefore exists, once this quantitative threshold is reached. The maximum size of the citron is also important. Rabbi Yehuda limits it to the capacity of a man to hold two in his palm. An imprecise but pragmatic criterion.

Our analysis of the *skhakh* and the *lulav* outlines a double anthropology: the technologies of the world anthropology, and the anthropology of vital principles. With Roland Barthes, but also with Périg Pitrou[28], we can recognize the technology of the transformation of life into matter. Ritual action establishes a chain of contiguities capable of giving coherence to a world composed of singularities.

Ethnographic variation

Building a *sukka* and holding the *lulav* are still an integral part of the ritual practice associated with the festival of Sukkot. There are, of course, regional and historical variations[29] in this practice. These variations are not the same for the *lulav* and *sukka* respectively. In the case of *lulav*, the issue lies at the crossroads of tradition and science, and relates above all to the citron, *etrog*. For the latter, aesthetic aspects and adaptation to the climate play a decisive role.

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[28] P. Pitrou, "Anthropology of Life and New Technologies", *Techniques & Culture* (2019).

[29] See for example W. Klein, S. Liberman Mintz, J. Teplitsky, (eds.), *Be Fruitful! The Etrog in Jewish Art, Culture, and History* (Jerusalem: Mineged Press, 2022) and R. Sarfati, *A Movable Feast: Sukkahs from Around the World* (Jerusalem: The Israel Museum, 2003), M. Levy Lipis, *Symbolic Houses in Judaism: How Objects and Metaphors Construct Hybrid Places of Belonging* (London: Routledge, 2017).

Figure 1: Frank Sultan, Old man holding branches of hadas, 1920, Yad Itzhaq Ben
Zvi, Israel nigleit ha-ain, Franck Sultan Travels in the Holy Land Album, 1923,
IL-INL-YBZ-0210-411.*

* שולטן, פרנק, 1881-1942 צלם, יהודי מבוגר מחזיק בידו הדס, אחד מארבעת המינים של חג הסוכות,
יד יצחק בן צבי (ישראל נגלית לעין), אוסף מסעות IL-INL-YBZ-0210-411, 1920-1923, סימול
YBZ.0210.411.;פרנק שולטן בארץ הקודש, יד יצחק בן צבי

Figure 2: Benno Rothenberg, Sukkot Market in Jerusalem, Meitar Collection,
The Pritzker Family National Photography Collection, The National Library of Israel,
NLI nr. 997009857913705171.

The citron and the modern botanical technology

Judaism seeks to integrate the achievements of science and technology and put them at the service of a „better" practice of the commandments. This general attitude towards scientific progress is part of an overall theological view that the world can be improved and that man has not only the right but also the duty to do so. God has certainly created the quiddities, living and non-living, which man must not modify. But he can, on the other hand, equip himself with instruments to better understand these quiddities, to describe them more precisely, and, consequently, to establish new boundaries between the forbidden and the permitted activity, the valid and the invalid artifact. In the case of the citron, contemporary science, especially Israeli but not only, has focused on two elements: establishing the non-hybrid character of the species and the maintenance of the *pitam*, the protuberance.

Figure 3: Gabi Laron, Jerusalem : Sukkot at the Wailing Wall, 15.10.2019,
Gabi Laron Archive, NLI nr 997009977189805171
Holding the lulav bouquet with citron/etrog in the first plan.

The interest in etrog hybridization stems from the Renaissance prohibition on the use of grafted *etrog* (*murkav*, composite) (16th century in Land of Israel, Italy and Poland). The problem of grafted etrogim is not mentioned by rabbis of Antiquity and there is no indication that such a problem existed in the times of the Mishna or Talmud. This practice entered the agricultural culture in the Middle East only in the Middle Ages. Indeed, it is only from this period that we hear about the possibility of grafting an etrog with various trees and the possible connection to other types of citruses. There are extensive references in rabbinic literature to the differences between pure and grafted etrogim. Hybridization can take two forms: the scion-rootstock method and pollination. The rabbinic concern had always been with the scion-rootstock method, in the past as nowadays. Was it because pollination could not be observed, documented, and controlled? This is another way to acknowledge that God's creation must be kept as such and that the hybridization in a natural manner is permitted. Only human intended and human mediated hybridization is forbidden. Given this religious concern, botanists and among them especially Eliezer Goldschmidt from the Hebrew University, undertook the genetical study of the etrog species compared to other citrus species like lemon, pomelo, mandarin, orange etc. This complex research was scheduled as "the search of the authentic citron" recognizing the cultural dimension, in the anthropological sense, of the etrog and, paradoxically, retracting the natural one. This article is a synthesis of the previous literature on the citron, not the publication of primary results; Goldschmidt published extensively on the citron biology and largely on the citrus family. For the purpose of the present presentation, it is nevertheless sufficient to refer to this 2005 article co-authored together with Elisabetta Nicolosi, Stefano La Malfa, Mohammed El-Otmani, and Moshe Negbi.

In its quest for authenticity, science at least partially supports traditional Jewish botanical knowledge. As much as Talmudic knowledge, limited to external observation, can provide the basis for a practice that emphasizes integrity and external beauty, botanical knowledge of the Renaissance and the early modern period does not seem to be able to meet rabbinic requirements. The "non-composite" etrog cannot be systematically identified: the plantings are rare and remote, and the result, the fruit, is not sufficiently characterized. Even less can one use internal criteria, invisible to the naked eye. Today's science invests the inner and the invisible as criteria of identification. However, it cannot provide criteria to establish whether a particular tree has been grafted, but it can support the thesis of the distinction between species, in this case, that of citron in relation to other citrus fruits, and also trace the phylogenetic lineage of the citron to reinforce the idea of an original species.

The second aspect that modern horticulture has focused on is the fruit beauty. According to Talmudic interpretations, the citron must be "beautiful",

hadar. Among these criteria of beauty, in addition to visual symmetry and regular touch, the presence of the *pitam* is most important. A *pitam* is composed of a style (Hebrew: *dad*), and a stigma (Hebrew: *shoshanta*), which usually falls off during the growing process and the passage from flower to fruit. The persistence of the *pitam* makes the fruit more "beautiful" and therefore, valuable. The genetic-physiological basis of style persistence has not been investigated, but synthetic auxins, known to inhibit a range of cutting off events, are effective in this system as well and may promote style persistence. The Picloram is largely used today by the Israeli farmers following the experiments conducted by E. Goldschmidt in the sixties. Working with the Picloram hormone in a citrus orchard one day, he discovered to his surprise that some of the Valencia Oranges of nearby had preserved beautiful, perfect *pitam*. Picloram was adopted by citron growers in Israel and is sprayed on citron trees during flowering as a means to obtain the highly desirable, persistent style citrons. The use of the hormone auxin does not raise *kosher* questions, probably because etrog is traditionally not really edible. It is primarily grown for the Sukkot ritual and secondarily as a scent. To perform the ritual, the appearance is enough to make the fruit valid, *kosher*. As long as the Picloram does not alter this appearance equivalent to quiddity, it is not forbidden, quite the contrary, since it helps to make the etrog, "more" *etrog* or bring it closer to perfection, to the ideal type.

The 'vernacular' sukka – in the Balkans and beyond

I would have liked to be able to deal in full with *sukka* in the Balkans. However, visual documentation is very limited. Generally speaking, the *sukka* is not well documented, despite its inclusion in the Bezalel Narkiss Index of Jewish Art database. My research, based on the catalogue of the National Library of Israel, the ANU Museum of Jewish People in Tel Aviv, the Jewish Museum of Athens, the Jewish Historical Museum in Belgrade, the Jewish Community in Belgrade, the Jewish Community in Zemun, the Federation of Jewish Communities in Serbia and the Centre for the Study of the Jews in Romania, brought to light around ten photographs relating to the festival of Sukkot in the Balkans. Synagogues are largely documented but the ephemeral ritual huts very scarcely.

However brief, the visual documentation speaks for itself, particularly in terms of the contrasts it reveals. For example, *sukka* in Central Asia differs from *sukka* in temperate European countries in the materials used to build the walls. In Central Asia, the partitions are made of carpets, whereas in Europe they are made of wooden planks, or even solid constructions with folding roofs. In Israel, where agricultural production is an important value, the partitions are made from palm branches.

For the Balkans, in the broadest sense of the term, we have three photographs from Romania and three from Greece, which are reproduced below. The oldest, dating from the early 20th century, comes from the Jewish community of Crăciunești, a village in Maramureș, Transylvania. The *sukka* is easily recognized by its green roof made of leafy branches, which contrasts with the wooden plank enclosures. A permanent *sukka* is immortalized in the next photo from the Great Synagogue in Braila, a town on the Danube in eastern Romania. The photo was taken before or after *Sukkot*, therefore the roof is not a ritual one but is intended to preserve the structure from year to year. The photo taken inside the *sukka* at Coral Temple in Bucharest does not reveal whether it is a permanent structure, but the appearance of the roof here too obeys Talmudic rules. The *skhakh kosher* and the *skhakh pasul* form a skillful blend governed by the prescribed proportions. In Greece, the three images we have, represent ritual huts adjacent to synagogues: Ioannina, Volos and Thessalonica. In Ioannina, the *sukka* is bounded on three sides by the walls of the synagogue, a situation described in the Talmudic treatise *Sukka*. In Volos, it is the frame that is captured, no doubt outside the festivities. Finally, in Thessaloniki, the sukka also incorporates the walls and the post of a staircase. This is more a case of *bricolage* than construction: you work with the current walls, but you don't build with planks. The frame is there, light but stable. Finally, the roof is as noticeable in Greece as anywhere else.

The last two images we have chosen to include here come from Israel. The photographic corpus is much richer when it comes to the festival of *Sukkot* in Israel, so our choice was more difficult. The first photo shows a *sukkah* in the process of being built, where in all likelihood the walls will be opened in order to emphasize the roof. In the second, representing pioneers in the *Keren ha-yesod* settlements, the roof is also highlighted, this time by the abundance of vegetation contrasting with the body of the *sukkah*.

Together, these images reveal the topicality and strength of the Talmudic conceptual framework, which is not distorted by historical and geographical interpretations.

Figure 4: Sukka at the Coral Temple in Bucharest, Romania, 1990. Photo Alexandru Kalatia, Coll. Federația comunităților evreiești din România), Museum of Jewish People, ANU nr:138420.
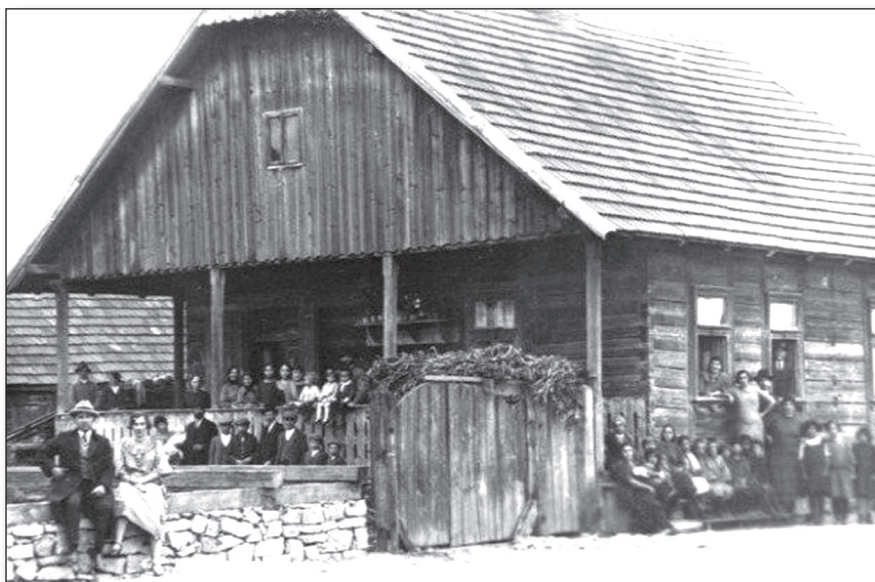

Figure 5: Family meeting to honor a visitor from America, Crăciuneşti, Romania, 1921-1924. A sukka is visible in the first plan. The Oster Visual Documentation Center, Museum of the Jewish People, Courtesy of Harry Walker, ANU nr. 187065.

Figure 6: Brăila Great Synagogue (Templul Coral), Permanent Sukka 2017 (ashkenazi) © Center for Jewish Art, Photographer: Vladimir Levin 2019, ID:303115.

Figure 7: *Old Congregation Synagogue (Kahal Kadosh Yashan) in Ioannina © Center for Jewish Art, Photographer: Radovan, Zev, 2001, ID: 36593.*

Figure 8: Sukkah and community offices, Volos. Photographic Archive of the Jewish Museum of Greece [20th century]. Judaica Europeana, Greece.

Figure 9: The Monastirio-ton Synagogue of Thessa-loniki, view of the exterior, detail from the Sukkah NW courtyard). Pho-tographic Archive of the Jewish Museum of Greece [20th century], Judaica Eu-ropeana, Greece.

Figure 10: *Sukka at the children camp, 1958, Yad Mordechai Archive IL-YMOR-001-70-013-001, NLI nr. 997012301788505171.*

Figure 11: Wooden sukkot elevated and covered with the skhakh, Abraham Malavsky, 1940-1941, IL-INL-YBZ-0695-103.*

מלבסקי אברהם
1940–1941,
צלם, סוכות עץ מוגבהות מהקרקע ועליהן סכך, משמאל יושבת נערה וקוראת ספר
IL-INL-YBZ-0695-103,

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