Several decades have passed since the standard works on the order of the paschal meal were written. The same can be said of the attempts to place the eucharistic words within the framework of that meal. The following study is meant to be an examination of a part of the material in these older works. I have reviewed much of the primary source material on which these earlier works rest; and find that the texts do not always support the reconstructions which were based on them. Therefore, I offer my own reconstruction of the order of the paschal meal and try to place the eucharistic words within that order. I shall not refer to previous reconstructions, since they will be familiar to the reader; to engage in polemics would only take up space.

The order of the paschal meal can be determined rather accurately by reconstructing the order of the normal festive meal and then changing and adjusting that order on the basis of the texts which deal specifically with the paschal meal. This is possible because the Jewish meals for special occasions were only variants of the one standard form of the festive meal.

An important point to note about the Jewish festive meal of the Tannaitic period is that it paralleled the contemporary Graeco-Roman festive meal, except for the specifically religious elements, e.g., prayers were said at the same points in both meals, but the content of the prayers were different in the respective meals. In their dining habits as well as in numerous other ways, the Jews were a part of the Graeco-Roman world, but not yet fully integrated. The similarities between the dining habits of the Jews and those of their contemporaries can be demonstrated for a long period prior to the age of the Tannaim, and both Tannaitic and Graeco-Roman texts point to the East as the source of their table customs. An abundance of textual material makes possible a detailed and
accurate reconstruction of the Jewish festive meal; wherever possible, I shall call attention to an even more copious supply of Graeco-Roman texts relative to the non-Jewish festive meal. In other words, I shall treat the paschal meal as one among many Jewish festive meals, and set the Jewish festive meals in the larger context of other festive meals in that period of history. In each case, I shall cite the earliest texts which I have been able to find; in almost every instance numerous additional texts could have been given. The vastness of the literature from this period of history precludes any claim to exhaustiveness.

Since the Tannaitic literature covers a period of about four centuries, I shall assign a more precise date to the texts whenever possible, even though my purpose is to reconstruct the paschal meal from the Tannaitic literature as a whole, and not as it was celebrated in any one part of that period. I shall also date the non-Jewish materials whenever that is possible. The disregarding of dates is one of the deficiencies which I find in previous works on this subject. If there is a history of Theology, and a history of the halakah, then there must also be a history of rites and ceremonies.

For both the festive meal and the paschal meal, we have two different kinds of textual material: those texts which present a summary or outline of the meal, and those which offer information on a particular part of the meal. The latter texts are scattered throughout the Tannaitic literature; the former are found in only five places. The three summarizing texts which deal with the festive meal are as follows.

(T. Berakoth 4, 8, 98)

What is the order of the meal? The guests enter [the house] and sit on benches, and on chairs until all have entered. They all enter and they [servants] give them water for their hands. Each one washes one hand. They [servants] mix for them the cup; each one says the benediction for himself. They [servants] bring them the appetizers; each one says the benediction for himself. They [guests] go up [to the dining room] and they recline, and they [servants] give them [water] for their hands; although they have [already] washed one hand, they [now] wash both hands. They [servants] mix for them the cup; although they have said a benediction over the first [cup] they say a benediction [also] over the second. They [servants] bring them the dessert; although they said a benediction over the first one, they [now] say a benediction over the second, and one says the benediction for all of them. He who comes after the third course has no right to enter.

(P. Berakoth 10d 4)