The Bible lists the “fruit of a goodly tree” (peri ेz hadar) as one of the four species used for ritual purposes on the festival of Sukkot (Lev. 23: 40). Rabbinic tradition identifies this fruit as the citron—citrus medica (etrog). The species described in Rabbinic literature are categorized according to their qualities, such as size, color, shape, taste, etc. For example, Rabbinic sources mention etrog ha-Kushi (dark citron), etrog ke-kadur (round like a ball), etrog adamdam (reddish), and the

1. The term “etrog” first appeared in the Mishnaic period; see, for example, Sukkah 3:4; Bikkurim 2:6. On citrons in the Bible and in rabbinic literature, see Yehuda Felix, Types of Fruit Trees—Biblical and Rabbinical Plants (Heb.) (Jerusalem, 1994), 150-60. On citrus fruit in ancient and later Jewish sources, see the review by Immanuel Löw, Die Flora der Juden (Vienna-Leipzig, 1924-1934), III:279-317.


3. Sukkah 36a. The etrog ha-Kushi apparently refers to a dark green citron. In fact, all citrons are black or dark green when young. Apparently, Abbayei believed that this was a species common in the land of Kush, and rarely found elsewhere. Cf. Rashi, Sukkah 34b, s. v. ha-kushi, who describes it as a darkly hued citron, similar to a dark-skinned person. Samuel Tolkowsky, Citrus Fruits (Heb.) (Jerusalem, 1966), 58, identifies it as a lemon, but his evidence is insufficient. For a critique, see Felix, Types of Fruit Trees, 155-56.

4. According to Samuel Tolkowsky, the ball-like (Sukkah 36a) and the reddish citron

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sweet citron (halitah).5 Halakhic authorities throughout the generations have considered the qualifications of various other species of citron, those grown in countries where Jews resided and those brought to Jewish communities from a distance in order to perform the ritual.6 These are often distinguished, among other things, by their geographical origins, such as etrog Teimani (Yemenite citron),7 etrog Marokani (Moroccan citron),8 and etrog Amerikani (Caribbean citron).9

The present article examines historical, botanical, and halakhic data concerning two species of citrons mentioned in medieval and modern halakhic literature. The first, the “fingered citron,” originates in Indochina, while the second, the dibdib, is a local species of citron that grows in Iraq.10

(Yerushalmi Sukkah 3:6, 53b) refer to an orange, which is round and reddish-orange in color (Tolkowsky, Citrus, 57). However, most researchers agree that oranges and other citrus fruits (with the exception of the citron) were unknown in the Land of Israel in the period of the Mishnah and Talmud; they reached the region only after the Arab conquests. See Andrew M. Watson, Agricultural Innovation in the Early Islamic World (London-New York, 1983), 45-48; Löw, Flora, III:316. For claims contradicting this identification, see Felix, Types of Fruit Trees, 156, n. 37, and compare Zohar Amar, Agricultural Produce in the Land of Israel in the Middle Ages (Heb.) (Jerusalem, 2000), 248, who states that the term “round etrog” appears in the writings of medieval Arab scholars, although the meaning of the term is uncertain in that context as well.

5. Shabbat 109b. See also Zohar Amar, The Four Species: Halakhic Inquiries from a Historical, Botanical, and Land of Israel Perspective (Heb.) (Neve Zuf, 2009), 37.


7. This is a fairly large citron, which is sweet and edible in its natural form. On its description and use among Yemenite Jews, see Yosef Kapaḥ, Customs of Yemen (Heb.) (Jerusalem, 1987), 33. On the halakhic debates regarding its permissibility for ritual purposes and possible problems with grafting, see Eliyahu Weissfish, The Complete Book of the Four Species (Heb.) (Jerusalem, 1979), 207. This issue merits a comprehensive and systematic discussion of its own.

8. See, for example, R. Ḥayyim David Ḥazan, Sefer Yishrei Lev (Izmir, 1870), Orah Ḥayyim, ot aleph, 1b; Weissfish, Four Species, 206; Yisrael David Harpenes, Book on the Fruit of the Citrus Tree: On the Issue of the Permissibility of Seedless Moroccan Citrons (Heb.) (Brooklyn, 1986), 5ff.; Eliezer E. Goldschmidt, “Moroccan Citrons—Impressions from a Tour” (Heb.), Halikhot Sadeh 100 (1996): 39-44; Ari Zivotofsky and Ari Greenspan, “The Four Species of the Citron,” Makor Rishon (October 10, 2008): 4. This issue also merits an independent scientific discussion.

9. These citrons are also called “West Indies Etrogim.” For a short summary of the halakhic literature on the Caribbean citron, see Ari Zivotofsky and Ari Greenspan, “The Story Behind the Esrog,” The Jewish Observer (October, 2008): 17-21.

The Fingered Citron

Historical and Botanical Background
Citrus fruit, including the citron, are subtropical crops that grow in relatively warm countries, and the trees are sensitive to cold and ailments.11 Geographically, the citron species (Citrus sp.) originates in eastern Asia, and to this day, citron trees grow wild in northern India. The citron was first domesticated in Persia—citron seeds were found at archeological sites in Mesopotamia and dated at 4000 B.C.E.—and Alexander the Great brought the citron to Greece during his military conquests in around the third century B.C.E.12

The scientific name of the fingered citron is *Citrus medica* var. *sarcodactylis* Swingle.13 The tree is small and bush-like and is commonly grown as an ornamental tree, similar to bonsai trees. The size of the fruit ranges from 15-30 cm., and it has a fragrant yellow peel. This particular citron lacks a gene that causes the sections of the fruit to fuse; the top of the fruit is thus split in a way reminiscent of human fingers, thus earning it its name.

The fingered citron has been known in the Far East for thousands of years, and it is considered a symbol of happiness in China.14 In early European studies of Chinese flora, reference to the fruit was first made by Martinus Martini in 1650, who described seeing these fruits in Tchang-teh-fu of Hunan province. Although Chinese botanical works do not describe the fingered citron before the sixteenth century, there is evidence that it was known in Chinese culture significantly earlier.15

12. On the ancient history of citrus fruit, see the monograph by Pierre Laszlo, *Citrus: A History* (University of Chicago Press, 2007), 12-13. Some suggest that the citron first appeared in the Land of Israel only when Jews returned from Persia or Babylon. Yehuda Felix rejects this opinion, arguing that the citron arrived in Israel from Eastern Asia at an earlier stage along with the other tropical perfumes (Felix, *Types of Fruit Trees*, 150). Recently, two scholars claimed that the *etrog* in the literature of the Mishnah and Talmud is the Lisbon lemon; see Gidon Biger and Nili Lifshitz, “The Citron is a Fruit of the Citrus Tree: On the Question of the Citron’s Prior Existence in Israel” (Heb.), *Beit Mikra* 42 (1997): 28-33. Felix, whose explanations are based on rabbinic sources, supplies more persuasive evidence that the citron is *C. medica*; see Yehuda Felix, “Fruit of the Citrus Tree: The *Etrog*” (Heb.), *Beit Mikra* 42 (1997): 288-92.
13. A synonym is *Citrus medica* var. *digitata*.
Ancient tradition identifies the special shape of the citron as Buddha’s fingers; this is the source of its Chinese name, *fo shou*, and its Japanese name, *bushukan*, which mean “Buddha’s hand citron” or “Buddha’s fingers citron.” Due to its strong fragrance, the finger citron has been used as an ingredient in China to perfume rooms and for religious ceremonies. It is also used as an ingredient in some Eastern recipes and for medical purposes.  

Samuel Tolkowsky, who studied the history of citrus fruits, noted that this citron was known to the ancient Egyptians as well, and it is featured on Egyptian wall drawings at *al-Kab.* Most Jewish communities in ancient times, however, were clearly not familiar with it.

*In the writings of Tanhum ha-Yerushalmi*

To the best of my knowledge, the fingered citron was first mentioned in Jewish sources in the 13th century by the Yemenite sage R. Tanhum ha-Yerushalmi. He mentions it by its Arabic name, *etrog al-ma’lab*, and identifies it with the *teyom* citron mentioned in the Talmud (*Sukkah* 36a). He writes: “Of the *al-ma’lab* citron, which has many fingers, two or more, it is said that the *teyom* and the *boser* may be used. And *boser* means unripe.” Two centuries earlier, Rashi described the *teyom* citron as two fruits that had grown as twins, probably as a result of stunted growth. In contrast, R. Tanhum states that the term indicates the fingered species, in which the fleshy part of the fruit splits into several finger-like segments. Tanhum does not explain why this citron is considered permissible for use in the four species, but its legitimacy may be based on the fact that this is the citron’s natural state.


20. Rashi, *Sukkah* 36a. A similar interpretation was proposed by the *Arukh* in the entry for *teyom* and by Rashba in his *Hiddushim* to *Sukkah* 36a. The citron has one ovary, but the Rashba may be referring to the genetically irregular growth of two ovaries.
The etymological source of the word “teyom” is unclear, and it is thus difficult to decide between the two possible meanings of the term. To date, there are no sources indicating whether the fingered citron was known to Jews living in ancient Israel or Babylonia.\footnote{21}

\textit{In the writings of Iraqi rabbis}

The fingered citron is mentioned in other Jewish sources only around six hundred years later, in the writings of R. Abdullah Somekh (1813–1889), a senior Jewish spiritual leader in 19\textsuperscript{th} century Babylon.\footnote{22} He discussed the issue in response to a letter sent by the Jewish community of the city Hankan, China, asking whether this citron may be used for ritual purposes on Sukkot. The letter was not dated and seems to have been sent during the second half of the nineteenth century.

R. Somekh’s reply was published in his \textit{Responsa Zivhei Žedek}.\footnote{23} The reply is followed by the opinion of R. Yosef Ḥayyim (Baghdad, 1835-1909), R. Somekh’s student, who is known by the name of his famous work, the \textit{Ben Ish Ḥai}. R. Hayyim was renowned for his greatness in \textit{musar} and Kabbalah, and particularly for his halakhic rulings, and he was highly esteemed in Oriental communities.\footnote{24} We have no way of knowing whether the two rabbis were asked about the citrons at the same time or whether R. Ḥayyim’s reply was added to his teacher’s response at a later stage.

It is important to note that as dominant Jewish legal authorities, R. Somekh and R. Ḥayyim received queries from all over the world regarding various halakhic questions, including from the Jewish communities in China\footnote{25} and India, which, although distant, were closest to the Babylonian center of Torah study.\footnote{26} A well-known responsum of R. Ḥayyim to the

\footnote{21. It is possible that in Babylonia, which is geographically closer to India, the fingered citron was indeed familiar, but we have no proof of this.}

\footnote{22. On his life and achievements, see Abraham Ben Yaakov, \textit{History of Rabbi Abdullah Somekh} (Heb.) (Jerusalem, 1949).}

\footnote{23. \textit{Orah Ḥayyim} no. 37. In the current study, we used the Jerusalem, 1969 edition, a facsimile reprint of Baghdad, 1896.}

\footnote{24. Among his writings are the halakhic work \textit{Ben Ish Ḥai—Halakhot}, I-II (Jerusalem, 1986); \textit{Responsa Rav Pe’alim} (Jerusalem, 1970), and \textit{Ben Yehoyada} on the legends of the Talmud. On his life and literary work, see at length Abraham Ben Yaakov, \textit{Jews of Babylon} (Heb.) (Jerusalem, 1979), 190-206; idem, \textit{Rabbi Yosef Ḥayyim of Baghdad} (Heb.) (Or Yehuda, 1984); Yitzchak Avishur, “Characteristics of the Literary-Popular Works of Three Babylonian Rabbis in the Latter Half of the 19\textsuperscript{th} Century” (Heb.), \textit{Pe’anim}, 59 (1994): 105-23.}

\footnote{25. Another halakhic question was sent by the people of Jin (China) to R. Yosef Ḥayyim regarding a certain card game popular among the local population; see \textit{Responsa Rav Pe’alim}, \textit{Yoreh De’ah} 2: #30.}

\footnote{26. Regarding the cultural ties and correspondence between the Jews of India and the communities of Babylon and Yemen, see Yosef Kapah, “Letters between the Leaders}
Jews of India deals with the issue of whether the laws of orlah apply to the papaya (*Carica papaya*) and which blessing should be recited over this fruit. In that case, the correspondence dealt with a local crop with which nearly the entire Jewish world was unfamiliar, and R. Ḥayyim’s reply was considered a first attempt at defining its halakhic status. In the current case as well, the rulings of R. Somekh and R. Ḥayyim regarding the fingered citrons form the basis for halakhic discussions on their permissibility in recent generations as well.

The question submitted to R. Somekh includes information explaining the circumstances leading to the dilemma:

Question from the province of Jin, Hanchan city. The citrons of Hanchan resemble those of Baghdad in their shape and marks, but there is one difference. From the middle of the citron towards the top, its shape resembles human-like fingers, and each citron has ten or fifteen fingers, some long and some short. What is the status of this citron; is it permitted or not? And the Jews of the city of Hanchan send for citrons from Egypt, but these become damaged on the way, and sometimes the citrons arrive from Egypt on the intermediate days of the festival, and for these reasons I ask whether these local citrons may be used to fulfill the ritual obligation and whether the blessing may be made over them or not.

The identity of the city of Hanchan is unclear (perhaps “Han-chan” = Hong Kong?), but there is no doubt that Jin is China, a country in which Iraqi Jews lived during the 19th century. The Jews of Hanchan usually did not use the fingered citron for ritual purposes. It seems that they had an ancient tradition that questioned its
permissibility, and members of the community preferred to make the blessing over citrons of similar shape and nature to those used in other Jewish communities and described in rabbinic sources. The issue of the permissibility of the fingered citron for ritual purposes was raised due to various technical problems that prevented shipments of citrons from reaching their destination on time and in good condition. The imported citrons were sometimes found upon arrival to be flawed as a result of inadequate storage (leading to rotting and shriveling) or mechanical damage. In other cases, the citrons did not arrive at their destination in time for the festival due to difficulties with transportation, weather, or trade delays. As a result of delayed shipments, the citrons sometimes arrived only on the intermediate days of the festival, when the primary, biblically-mandated part of the ritual could no longer be fulfilled. The members of the community thus wondered whether the local fingered citron could be used in such times of emergency.

R. Somekh ruled, like Tanḥum ha-Yerushalmi before him, that it is permitted to make the blessing over the fingered citron, as this is its natural shape. In his opinion, it is not deemed a citron “made to resemble a different creature,” which would make it impermissible; that law relates to irregularly shaped citrons produced artificially by growing them in a mold or with various implements. 31 Although the fingered citron has about fifteen fingers, in principle it is comparable to the teyom citron, which is permissible despite the fact that it is divided in two.

In contrast to his teacher, R. Ḥayyim disallowed use of the fingered citron for use as one of the four species:

The citrons mentioned in the question are not permissible since in the case of citrons, the identifying marks are insufficient, and we should allow only those that have a tradition of being citrons or that are very similar to citrons of another city that have a tradition of being permissible. But in the case of any tree of which we have no tradition that it is a citron tree and its fruit are not very similar to the citrons of another place that has a tradition, its fruit should not be allowed even if we see that its fruit have all the marks of a citron. In any case, those that have one major difference should not be permitted since in the case of fruit, some have the marks of a citron but are

31. See Sukkah 36a. This is the law as ruled by the Shulḥan Arukh, Orah Ḥayyim 648:19. This source is relevant to the contemporary custom of using citrons with a “gartel” (belt), which is popular among Ḥasidim. Prof. Yehuda Felix claimed that these citrons are not natural; they are tied around the middle when small to produce their special shape, which raises doubts regarding their permissibility; see Felix, Types of Fruit Trees, 153). In fact, many citrons naturally have a gartel, as can be seen in orchards and even in an ancient mosaic in Caesarea, Israel. Regarding this citron, see Moshe Bar-Yosef, “Etrogs Bound at the Waist” (Heb.), Galileo 7 (1994): 39.
not considered citrons and some citrons are grafted and are not permissible despite having the marks of a citron.\textsuperscript{32}

R. Hayyim presents two central reasons for disallowing the fingered citron:

1. **The fingered citron has no multi-generational tradition of being used for Sukkot.** The main reason for disallowing this citron is the concern that Halakhah does not consider the fingered citron a “type of citron” permitted for ritual use, as it has no historically continuous tradition of being ritually certified. The fingered citron is a local species that grows in a specific area. Because it was not common in European and Oriental Jewish communities, it had no associated tradition similar to other citrons. Although the fingered citron has the shape and qualities of a citron, it is not permissible because it was not used for ritual purposes even in communities familiar with it; this historical fact proves that it was not considered a certified citron.

   The requirement of a reliable tradition seems to have been rooted in the concern that the fruit was grafted, which would render it unsuitable for ritual use. Grafting was a common agricultural technique among farmers in previous centuries; citrons were grown on the stump of a tree (rohев) that was durable and resistant to disease, particularly lemon trees and more often that of the hushhash (sour orange, Citrus aurantium).\textsuperscript{33}

   The concern that citrons were grown in this manner is often mentioned in halakhic literature beginning in the 16th century, and it was voiced concerning citrons that grew in various locations, particularly Greece and Italy.\textsuperscript{34}

2. **The fingered citron has an irregular shape, unlike that of other citrons.** Citrons may be considered permissible for ritual purposes even in the absence of a historical tradition provided that they resemble citrons used in other communities. Although the Fingered citron has the characteristics of a citron, its general shape is different than that of citrons commonly used for ritual purposes.\textsuperscript{35}

\textsuperscript{32} Responsa Zivhei Zedek, Orah Hayyim #37.

\textsuperscript{33} Regarding the attitude of Halakhah towards the agricultural practice of grafting plants, see in detail Yehuda Felix, *Mixed Sowing, Breeding, and Grafting* (Heb.) (Tel Aviv, 1967), 112-15.

\textsuperscript{34} On the issue of grafted citrons, see, for example, R. Ḥayyim Elazar Wax, *Responsa Nefesh Hayah* (1877), Orah Ḥayyim #2-4; R. Daniel Tirani, *Ikkarei Ha-Dat* (Vilna, 1880), Orah Ḥayyim, Hilkhot Lulav #33. For a collection of sources on this matter, see Weissfish, *Four Species*, 188-205. Several articles have been published on this topic; see Yitzchak Refael, “Citrons of Corfu and Citrons of the Land of Israel” (Heb.) in *Sefer Shragai II* (Jerusalem, 1985); Ḥayyim Yitzchak Hamiel, “The Role of Yosef Zeharia Stern in the Controversy Regarding the Citrons of Corfu” (Heb.), in *Sefer Refael: Articles and Research on Bible and Jewish studies in Memory of Dr. Yitzchak Refael* (Jerusalem, 2000), 242-51.

\textsuperscript{35} This claim is reinforced later in the responsa: “And similar to the citrons mentioned
R. Ḥayyim’s requirement of a certain desirable shape is interesting considering the fact that some citrons with a tradition of being permissible, such as Yemenite and Moroccan citrons, differ in size, the lumpiness of the peel, and the presence of seeds (which Moroccan citrons lack entirely). R. Ḥayyim seems to maintain that citrons are considered acceptable if they boast a characteristic common to all familiar citrons; in other citrons, the fruit is not divided into separate segments, while the fingered citron is divided into several fingers.

R. Ḥayyim argues that the irregular *teyom* citron is considered ritually permissible despite its divided shape only when it grew on a regular citron tree. In the case of the fingered citron, however, the entire tree produces irregularly shaped citrons. R. Ḥayyim suggests that when the Bible instructs to take a “fruit of the citrus tree,” the injunction encompasses specific species, and does not include the Indian species. He does not, however, explain the reason for this exclusion or specify criteria meriting inclusion. R. Ḥayyim concludes by claiming that R. Somekh also maintained that these citrons are not ritually permissible, but as we have shown, R. Somekh in fact was inclined to accept them.

During World War II, students of the Mirrer Yeshiva fled Eastern Europe for Shanghai, China.36 There, they encountered the fingered citron and, like the Jews of China centuries before, they deliberated whether it is ritually permissible. They received a ruling not to use it for the Four Species, even without a *berakhah*.37 The ritual status of fingered citrons remains a relevant issue today as well, particularly for Jewish tourists visiting India and China on the festival of Sukkot and for those who look for “exotic” ways to perform *mitzvot*.

In 2006, the two leading *posekim* of the Orthodox Union (OU) *kashrut* supervising agency, R. Yisrael Belsky and R. Hershel Schachter, ruled against the use of the fingered citron for the *mitzvah*. They asserted that because the fingered citron has a strange shape, it is forbidden to recite a *berakhah* over it even though it is genetically considered a citron. Arguing against those who claim that the citron is permissible, like the

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teyom citron, R. Belsky wrote: “Do not confuse the public again with such strange inventions.”

The Dibdib Citron

As a supplement to his discussion of the fingered citron, R. Yosef Hayyim considered the permissibility of the *dibdib* citron for use as one of the Four Species. According to his description, this is a local species of citron known for its sour taste, which limited its use to the preparation of jams.

It is difficult to arrive at a precise identification of this citron. The data provided by R. Hayyim correspond to a species of citron described in agricultural literature and medieval halakhic sources as sour-tasting, a trait particularly true of its thick peel. Thus, for example, medieval Arab polymath Ibn Rushd (Averroes; d. 1198 in Morocco) wrote that this citron is “Turunj, a lemon type fruit, it is also known as utroj, and people from eastern countries call it kabad.” The *kabad* was described along with other sweet species, called *halitah* or *sidra*.

The *dibdib* is mentioned in several Babylonian halakhic sources. R. Hayyim himself mentions it in the *Ben Ish Ḥai* in his discussion of the issue of non-Jewish cooking (*bishul akum*): “And here in our city there is an extremely sour fruit called *dibdib* and it is similar to the citrons and its thick peel is cooked in sugar.” R. Somekh mentions it as well in a discussion of the proper blessing to be said over jams prepared in the Babylonian kitchen: “In our country, they make a jam out of the peels of sour citrons called *kushur al-dibdib* in Arabic.”

R. Hayyim writes regarding the permissibility of the *dibdib* for performing the ritual of the Four Species:

39. The inner juicy pulp of the citron, referred to as the “citron’s bowels” in rabbinic literature, is sour in all citrons (*Tosefta Terumot* 10:2) and was therefore eaten to increase appetite. See Saul Lieberman, *Tosefta ki-Peshutah* (New York, 1955), *Zera’im*, 464.
40. Ibn Rushd, *Katab Alkaliat fi Altab* (Madrid, 1939), no. 41. Compare Amar, *Agricultural Produce*, 250, who asserts that this is probably a type of sour citron and that this name was used for a local species growing in the Land of Israel as well as for other citrus fruits, such as the hushhash.
41. See, for example, *Shabbat* 109b.
43. *Ben Ish Ḥai*, Year II, Parashat Ḥukkat, halakhah 17.
44. *Kushur al-dibdib* = the *dibdib*’s garbage or peel. R. Somekh reports that citron peels were left to dry for a long time to remove all worms and insects before cooking. However, some still avoided eating them; see *Responsa Zivhei Ḥzedek* #906. Regarding the preparation of jams from sweet citrons in eighteenth century Palestine, see R. Mosheh Ben Menachem Mendel, *Sha’arei Yerushalayim* (Warsaw, 1879), sha’ar 6; *Peri ha-Areẓ*, 28.
You shall find here in our city of Baghdad, may God protect it, a fruit of the tree called *dibdib*, and it has some of the marks of a citron and the appearance of a citron, but it is sour. Nonetheless, there is a tradition here in our city that these fruits are not citrons and that they are inadmissible, and even if one year there are no citrons available, these fruit cannot be used, even without a blessing. But aside from this, the *dibdib* has all the marks of a citron, and its appearance is identical to our citrons. It is no different from our citrons except that our citrons are sweet and this is sour, and what of it? Admittedly, some citrons are sour and some are sweet, and in truth most of the citrons in the world are sour, but nevertheless it is ritually impermissible.  

The *dibdib* has all the characteristics of a citron (shape, bumpiness, coloring, etc.), aside from one—its sour taste. As a result of this irregularity relative to other species of citrons, it was traditionally considered ritually impermissible in Babylon, but the reasoning is unclear, this being only a marginal difference. In this case as well, R. Ḥayyim cites historical tradition as the primary reason for prohibiting or certifying citrons for ritual use. The Babylonian tradition insisted on using only sweet citrons for ritual purposes, perhaps because rabbinic sources describe the citron as a fruit that is eaten in its natural form, and the *dibdib* was so sour that this was impossible.

R. Ḥayyim presents another concern regarding the *dibdib* citron, which he noted about the fingered citron as well—that it may have been the result of grafting. He writes, “The *dibdib* that grows here in this city has all the identifying marks of a citron but nonetheless is not traditionally acknowledged as a citron or maybe it is the result of grafting.” R. Ḥayyim claims that the concern about grafting is present regarding the *dibdib*, despite the fact that the fruit has the marks and characteristics of a citron, because the marks are not necessarily evidence of the citron’s basic nature.

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45. *Responsa Zivhei Ḥedek*, *Orah Ḥayyim* #37.
46. As the result of the growing problem of grafting citrons, rabbinic literature mentions various marks that help distinguish between non-grafted citrons and those grafted on lemon trees. For example, those grafted on lemons have no bumps and *pittam*, and the *okez* is not sunken. On this issue, see Weissfish, *Four Species*, 41-46, 291.
47. Compare *Ben Ish Hai*, Year I, *Parashat Re’eh*, *halakhah* 11: “And here in our city, the citron is sweet but is not common, rather rare.” According to other testimonies, the scarcity of citrons in Babylon led Jews to import them from other countries. This explains the deliberation regarding whether the *dibdib* could be used when there were no citrons to be found in Iraq, and according to R. Ḥayyim’s reply, this was the customary practice. See Abraham Ben Yaakov, “Customs of the Jews of Babylon (Iraq),” in *Collection of Customs—Customs of the Tribes of Israel* (Heb.), ed. Asher Vassertil (Jerusalem, 1996), 170-71.
49. Halakhic authorities disputed whether the major factor determining whether
Summary and Discussion

In this article, we have examined the historical, botanical, and halakhic background of two species of citron—the fingered citron and the dibdib. In general, there is little evidence of these two citrons in halakhic literature, as they grow in distant areas far from major Eastern and Western Jewish centers, and only local communities in the Far East were familiar with them. Although R. Tanḥum ha-Yerushalmi of Yemen and R. Abdullah Somekh of Baghdad permitted the use of the fingered citron, despite its unusual form, R. Yosef Ḥayyim forbade its ritual use due to a lack of tradition, its irregular shape, and the concern that it may be the result of grafting.

Interestingly, R. Somekh and R. Ḥayyim discussed the question of the fingered citron’s permissibility without referring to its significance in Indian culture. They voiced no concern about using the citron based on the citron’s identification as “Buddha’s fingers,” despite the fact that it is likely that they were aware of this ethno-folkloristic aspect.

R. Ḥayyim also discussed the ritual permissibility of a local species of citron called dibdib, whose sour taste differentiated it from all other Iraqi citrons and was therefore not used by the local community for the ritual of the Four Species.

The issue of the ritual permissibility of the fingered and dibdib citrons is connected to the wider halakhic issue of the definition of species—namely, which principles and criteria determine a plant’s species from a halakhic point of view. R. Ḥayyim claimed that a ritually permitted citron should display certain characteristics featured by all other recognized citrons, and any irregularity renders the citron impermissible for ritual purposes. The fruit of familiar citron species is un-segmented, while that of the fingered citron is segmented. Similarly, the dibdib is sour tasting, while other citrons are sweet. Clearly, this distinction has no parallel in botanical classifications, as changes in taste or shape may distinguish between different subspecies but are not indications of entirely different species.

In his discussion of the ritual permissibility of these citrons, R. Ḥayyim focused on the historical traditions regarding their use within a citron is considered grafted or if it is ritually permissible is its shape and marks or the testimony of the seller. Although R. Ḥayyim does not state so specifically, in practice he ruled as R. Mosheh Sofer did in the 19th century—the determining factor is the historical tradition regarding the citron’s status. See Responsa Ḥatam Sofer, Orah Ḥayyim #207. And on this issue, see at length Weissfish, Four Species, 57-58; Amar, Four Species, 41-54.

50. On this issue see Shemesh, Flora Blessings, 18-19.
different Jewish communities. This outlook is characteristic of relatively recent halakhic authorities, who claim that the element of tradition is the determining factor concerning citrons whose grafted status is uncertain. A tradition passed down over the generations provides historical proof of a citron’s legitimacy, on the assumption that this was the basis for its use in Jewish communities. However, R. Hayyim does not reject the possibility that a citron with no such tradition could be legitimate as well, provided that it has no irregular qualities.

The emphasis on tradition in the discussion regarding citron permissibility is somewhat reminiscent of the process in which certain species of fowl were ruled permissible based on tradition. In both cases, tradition served as a decisive factor in the absence of objective unequivocal criteria for determining the nature of the species.