Contextualizing Bread: An Analysis of Talmudic Discourse in Light of Christian and Islamic Counterparts

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Rabbinic Sages change the practical implications of received normative statements through the manipulation of context. The strategies of contextualization that these Rabbis employ when ascribing their own opinions to predecessors who espoused different ideas become evident through analysis of passages of the Babylonian Talmud that address the law prohibiting Jewish consumption of bread baked by gentiles. Analysis of these passages, moreover, sheds light on the way in which Rabbinic Sages think about gentiles. By placing Talmudic texts within an analytical context that includes texts from the New Testament, John Chrysostom, and various Muslim authorities, this article also demonstrates the value to academic scholars of comparing texts produced within multiple religious communities.

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BREAD IS significant stuff. Bread was so central to the ancient Near Eastern diet that the Hebrew word *leḥem* serves as a metonym for food itself; the English phrase "bread and butter" still refers to basic needs. Breaking bread together is a paradigmatic sign of fellowship, of being a "companion" in both the etymological and colloquial senses of that word. Bread is a bearer of cultural symbolism: consider the images that come to mind when one thinks of pita, poori, rye bread, and white bread. And we should not forget that amidst all of this symbolic baggage, we usually treat bread simply as bread, a tasty and filling foodstuff whose primary ingredients are flour and water.

So what is it that makes any given loaf of bread more than just a loaf of bread? In a word, context. Why did Jewish authorities in the Greco-Roman world prohibit eating bread baked by gentiles even when its contents, flour and water, were completely kosher? In a word, context. Why did some Talmudic Rabbis permit eating such bread in one place while condemning its consumption someplace else? Because of differences in context. How do Rabbinic Sages who venerate the authority of their predecessors reach unprecedented legal conclusions while making it seem as if nothing has changed? By manipulating context.

Rabbinic virtuosity is characterized by the ability to reach innovative conclusions without appearing to be innovative. In the words of a famous passage in the Babylonian Talmud (B.), "Only someone who can render swarming creatures pure by means of the Torah is fit to serve on the high court" (B. *Sanhedrin* 17a). In other words, an outstanding jurist is the one who can prove that swarming creatures are pure using evidence from the Torah itself. What makes this trick so impressive is that the Torah explicitly declares such creatures to be impure (Deut. 14:19). This article examines several instances of Rabbinic virtuosity as applied to the law regarding bread baked by non-Jews, what I call "gentile bread" for the sake of brevity. We will encounter Talmudic Sages who make it seem as if earlier authorities prohibit what they actually deemed permissible, as well as Sages who portray established prohibitions as if they have always contained major exceptions. These Sages accomplish their feats by redefining the social contexts in which existing statements of law apply and by situating those statements within new rhetorical and interpretive contexts.

This article pursues three goals in its analysis of Rabbinic statements about the permissibility of gentile bread. First, it seeks to explain how participants in Talmudic legal discourse understand this law and, by extension, how they think about gentiles. Second, it seeks to unpack the

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strategies of contextualization these participants employ when ascribing their own opinions to predecessors who probably espoused very different ideas. Third, and perhaps most importantly, it seeks to demonstrate the academic value of an underutilized analytic approach to contextualizing Rabbinic works and other forms of religious literature.

Scholars of religion, no less than Talmudic Sages, employ strategies of contextualization when interpreting primary sources. We usually analyze religious texts by comparing them to other sources from the same historical milieu or the same intellectual tradition. Analyzing texts within their synchronic historical context is vital for understanding the social matrix within which religious ideas and texts emerged. There are, however, limits to what we can glean from the finite sources that relate directly to Rabbinic culture of late antiquity—and, indeed, to any premodern religious culture. Similarly, contextualization within the diachronic framework of an intellectual tradition is a crucial prerequisite for analyzing the evolution of religious ideas, but the surviving literary corpus does not always contain clear answers to the questions that academics pose. We may imagine synchronic comparisons as "horizontal" and diachronic comparisons as "vertical"; I contend that we should employ not only horizontal and vertical comparisons but also "diagonal" comparisons.

I make the case in this article that we can better understand the ideas of Rabbinic Sages when we situate Talmudic legal discourse not only in its historical and traditional contexts but also within a broader analytical context that encompasses normative discourse produced in other religious communities. This context is ahistorical, as it incorporates texts produced in different milieus and different intellectual traditions. Comparisons made along this diagonal, however, are no more artificial than horizontal or vertical comparisons: all comparisons are constructed by scholars through their own acts of contextualization (Smith 1990: 51). Diagonal comparisons generate useful hypotheses for understanding a target source, hypotheses that can then be tested within the framework of that source's historical or traditional milieu by means of horizontal or vertical comparisons.[1] By viewing a Talmudic text through the lens provided by a Christian or Islamic text, even when we have no reason to suspect any historical relationship between these texts, we are afforded a perspective on the Talmudic passage that we might not have considered otherwise. Diagonal comparisons, moreover,

[1]Because diagonal comparison serves to complement rather than replace comparisons grounded in historical analysis, this approach avoids a major drawback to the type of comparison which Jonathan Z. Smith labels "morphological" (1982).

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enable us to identify those aspects of Rabbinic thought that are common to multiple systems of normative discourse and those that are distinctively Rabbinic. As Wendy Doniger puts it, "Comparison makes it possible for us literally to *cross*-examine cultures, by using a myth [or other text—DF] from one culture to reveal to us what is *not* in a telling from another culture" (Doniger 1998: 33, emphases original).

It is fitting for an article that demonstrates a method of academic contextualization and analyzes Rabbinic manipulations of context to focus on a law that itself hinges on context. We usually think of food restrictions as relating to the contents of one's food: ingredients such as pork products or alcohol. Indeed, the dietary laws found in the Torah are exclusively ingredient-based. Discourse about gentile bread, in contrast, has nothing to do with the contents of such bread. It focuses on contextual matters: who prepares the bread, from whom one acquires it, with whom one eats it. Through laws regulating the contexts of food production and consumption, Jewish, Christian, and Islamic authorities express their ideas about adherents of other religions (Freidenreich 2011). This article, therefore, explores the role of context at three levels: the substantive level of gentile bread, the textual level of Rabbinic ideas about such bread, and the analytical level of scholarship about these ideas.

Concern about food prepared by gentiles first appears in Judean works from the last centuries before the Common Era. The authors of these works envisioned restrictions on access to such food as a means of preserving Jewish distinctiveness within a Hellenistic culture that rewarded assimilation. They bolstered these new restrictions by telling new stories in which heroes from Abraham to Esther condemn the consumption of food associated with non-Jews (Jub. 22.16; Add. Esth. C 28). Daniel, Tobit, and Judith pointedly abstain from bread and other foods prepared by gentiles; the author of the Book of Judith indicates that the problem with such food relates specifically to the "nationality" of its preparer (Dan. 1:8; Tob. 1:11; Jdt. 12:2–3). The Mishnah, the foundational text of Rabbinic law redacted in the early third century CE, forbids Jewish consumption of gentile bread without qualification (*'Avodah Zarah* 2.6). Talmudic Sages, active during the third through sixth centuries, take the existence of this traditional prohibition for granted.

With this background in mind, we turn our attention to legal discourse about gentile bread found in the Babylonian Talmud, or "Bavli." The Bavli, which reached more or less its present form by the early seventh century, preserves a vast number of statements attributed to earlier Rabbinic Sages (denoted with the honorific Rabbi or Rav, abbreviated R.). The primary pericope addressing gentile bread (B. *'Avodah Zarah* 35b) contains several such statements, which the pericope's

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anonymous redactors fused together.[2] In order to understand the various ideas expressed in this passage more clearly, we will first examine these attributed statements individually and only later turn to the redacted version of the text. Before reaching the conclusion of this article, we will also examine an important statement about gentile bread that appears later in the same Talmudic chapter (B. *ʿAvodah Zarah* 38b).

REDEFINING SOCIAL CONTEXTS

The Bavli's primary pericope about gentile bread revolves around the following account of an incident involving R. Yehudah ha-Nasi ("the Prince," commonly referred to simply as "Rabbi"), among the most authoritative Sages of early third-century Palestine. This account was first reported in Babylonia by R. Dimi, an early fourth-century Sage who, in his travels between the two major centers of Rabbinic culture, regularly brought to Babylonia traditions circulating in Palestine.

> When R. Dimi came [from Palestine], he said: Once Rabbi went out in the fields and a gentile brought him professionally baked bread prepared from a *se'ah* of flour. Rabbi said, "How nice is this bread—why did Sages see fit to prohibit it?"

By expressing his astonishment that gentile bread should be prohibited, Rabbi apparently permits its consumption without reservation. Rabbi and his court were known to have nullified other traditional prohibitions, including the prohibition against consuming olive oil pressed by gentiles (B. *ʿAvodah Zarah* 36a, 38b; Rosenblum 2009).

The apparent disregard for the traditional prohibition against gentile bread expressed in this account, however, troubled many later Sages, including the late-third-century Palestinian R. Yoḥanan.

> R. Kahana said in the name of R. Yoḥanan: No court permitted [gentile] bread. Even for those who think that Rabbi permitted [gentile] bread, this applies in the fields but not in town.

R. Yoḥanan, clearly uncomfortable with the notion that Rabbi permitted eating gentile bread, insists that no court ever nullified the prohibition

[2]Citations of this pericope are based on Ms. JTS Rab. 15 (Abramson 1957), whose text is superior to that of the standard Vilna edition in several respects. On this pericope and its manuscript variants, see Steinfeld (1995). All translations below, of the Talmud and other primary sources, are original.

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against consuming gentile bread and that Rabbi's permission, if in fact genuine, must apply only "in the fields." The ambiguity of the question, "Why did Sages see fit to prohibit it?" allows R. Yoḥanan to suggest that Rabbi's question does not actually imply a permission of gentile bread. The setting of this account "in the fields," moreover, provides the unusual terminology that R. Yoḥanan uses to limit the applicability of this permission. We will return to this terminology after completing our survey of attributed statements in our primary Bavli pericope.

The early fourth-century Babylonian R. Yosef (or his colleague, R. Shemu'el bar Yehudah) refuses to accept R. Dimi's account and offers an alternative version of Rabbi's question regarding bread. R. Yosef and R. Ḥelbo, a contemporaneous Babylonian Sage, proceed to interpret this alternative account in different ways.

> R. Yosef (some say R. Shemu'el b. Yehudah) said: That was not what happened. Rather, once Rabbi went to a certain place and saw that bread was scarce for the disciples. He said, "Is there no bread salesman here?" The people thought he meant a gentile bread salesman, but he only meant a Jewish bread salesman. R. Ḥelbo said: Even for those who think [he referred to] a gentile bread salesman, this [permission] applies in places where there is no Jewish bread salesman, but not in places where there is a Jewish bread salesman.

R. Yosef, like R. Yoḥanan, supports the traditional prohibition against gentile bread and therefore seeks to dismiss the relevance of Rabbi's apparent disregard for this prohibition. For that reason, he rejects the accuracy of the account brought by R. Dimi and offers an alternative account in which Rabbinic disciples lacked bread, a dietary staple. Rabbi expressed surprise about the lack of a local bread salesman (*palṭer*). According to R. Yosef, Rabbi actually referred to a Jewish salesman who sells bread baked only by Jewish bakers. The people, however, misunderstood and thought that Rabbi was referring to any bread salesman, Jewish or gentile, selling bread from any source. According to R. Yosef, the notion that Rabbi ever permitted gentile bread is erroneous and thus the traditional prohibition against all gentile bread stands unchallenged. R. Ḥelbo interprets the alternative account in a different manner. Affirming the notion that Rabbi's question "Is there no bread salesman here?" refers to any salesman, Jewish or gentile, R. Ḥelbo limits Rabbi's implicit permission of gentile bread to places that lack Jewish bread salesmen.

R. Yosef's statement is clear. The statements of R. Yoḥanan and R. Ḥelbo, however, require further explanation. Each ascribes to Rabbi a

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limited permission of gentile bread, but the initial account of Rabbi's question implies that Rabbi himself endorsed a much broader permission. Traditional norms, meanwhile, prohibit gentile bread entirely. How, then, do R. Yoḥanan and R. Ḥelbo justify their unprecedented rulings? These authorities employ terms drawn from the accounts about Rabbi—"the fields," a "bread salesman"—but what do these terms signify when they appear in statements of law rather than in narratives? We can begin to answer these questions by reading these statements of third- and fourth-century Sages preserved in the Babylonian Talmud in light of contemporaneous statements found in Palestinian Rabbinic literature, an act of horizontal comparison.[3] Ultimately, however, I suggest that we can better understand the meaning of this pair of statements by also reading them "diagonally," through the lens of non-Rabbinic sources of different time periods.

R. Yoḥanan distinguishes between gentile bread "in the fields" and bread acquired "in town." These usually complementary terms (e.g., Deut. 28:3) are opposed to one another only once in the Torah, in the case of a betrothed woman who had sex with a man other than her fiancé (Deut. 22:23–27). If the act occurred "in town," Deuteronomy presumes that it was consensual, because someone in the neighborhood would have heard the cries of a rape victim. If the act occurred "in the fields," however, Deuteronomy presumes that the woman did cry out but that no one was there to rescue her from her rapist. Setting aside the problematic nature of the Torah's presumptions, we see that "town" is a place where other people are present, while "fields" are places where other people are scarce. The third-century Palestinian Rabbinic commentary Sifrei understands this underlying principle to apply regardless of where the sex act occurred: even in town, if the possibility of rescue is absent, then the court should presume that the woman did in fact cry out for help. Sifrei interprets Deuteronomy's terms "town" and "field" as referring to locations where something is present or absent, respectively (Sifrei Devarim §243). R. Yoḥanan, it seems, uses these terms in the same sense when discussing gentile bread (Steinfeld 1995: 339–340). He is willing to relax the traditional prohibition against consuming gentile bread only "in the fields," which is to say, places where Jews and Jewish bread are scarce.

[3]Another approach to horizontal comparison, one that has become increasingly commonplace within academic Talmud scholarship, is to read these statements in light of contemporaneous statements found in Christian or Zoroastrian literature from Sasanid Babylonia. I am, however, unaware of Babylonian sources that shed light on the question at hand.

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The principle that scarcity of Jewish bread constitutes valid grounds for permitting gentile bread, moreover, is attested explicitly in the Palestinian Talmud (the "Yerushalmi," redacted in the mid-fifth century), which preserves the statements of various fourth-century Palestinian Sages on this subject. R. Yonatan states that the law regarding gentile bread is among "the laws based on obfuscation (*ʿimʿum*)." R. Manna explains this statement as follows: "Wherever Jewish bread is unavailable gentile bread ought to [remain] prohibited. Nevertheless, they obfuscated in order to permit it because of [the needs of] living beings."[4] We saw that concern regarding the scarcity of bread also plays a central role in the alternative account of Rabbi's behavior found in the Bavli.

On the basis of comparison with other Rabbinic statements, therefore, we may reasonably infer that R. Yoḥanan justifies his limited permission of gentile bread on the grounds of necessity. R. Yoḥanan, however, chooses not to refer to this concern directly but instead employs the unusual term, "in the fields." By drawing on language found in the tradition about Rabbi transmitted to Babylonia by R. Dimi, R. Yoḥanan is able to claim that Rabbi himself only intended his statement to apply in this limited context.

R. Ḥelbo, like R. Yoḥanan, limits Rabbi's permission of foreign bread to places that lack Jewish bread. R. Ḥelbo, however, expresses this limitation with reference specifically to a "bread salesman," the term used by Rabbi in the account offered by R. Yosef. We might think that R. Yoḥanan and R. Ḥelbo say the same thing in different words, but evidence from the Yerushalmi pericope cited above suggests otherwise. There, we learn that the Palestinian R. Yaʿaqov bar Aḥa, another fourth-century Sage, limits the permissibility of gentile bread, even in cases of necessity, to bread bought from a bread salesman. This puzzling requirement, then, has an existence independent of the language used in R. Yosef's account of Rabbi's question. What logic lies behind the distinction between bread purchased from a salesman and other kinds of bread?

The Yerushalmi pericope in which R. Yaʿaqov bar Aḥa's statement appears offers a partial answer to this question. As we have seen, it presents the regulations governing gentile bread as "among the laws based on obfuscation (*ʿimʿum*)," that is, intentional ambiguity. Other

[4]The same discussion of how obfuscation applies to gentile bread, with virtually identical language, appears several times in the Yerushalmi: *Sheviʿit* 8.4, 38a; *Maʿaser Sheni* 1.4, 3c; *Shabbat* 1.4, 3c; *ʿAvodah Zarah* 2.8, 41d. In the first two cited passages, bread is discussed alongside other "laws based on obfuscation," including the case of sabbatical produce discussed below.

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such laws addressed in the Yerushalmi hinge on a Rabbinic version of the "don't ask, don't tell" policy: one may perform an otherwise forbidden activity so long as one does not state explicitly that one's action contravenes the law. Thus, for example, it is forbidden to tell a worker during the sabbatical year, "Pick me some vegetables today in exchange for [this coin]," as one may not buy or sell sabbatical produce. One may, however, tell a worker "Here is a coin; pick me some vegetables today," as in the latter statement the payment is not explicitly linked to the produce. The Yerushalmi, however, does not indicate what words ought to be avoided in the case of gentile bread, nor does R. Yaʿaqov bar Aḥa explain how the acquisition of bread from a bread salesman affects the ambiguity of the transaction. Unfortunately, no other Rabbinic text provides additional information regarding the precise meaning of the unusual term *ʿimʿum*, so our line of inquiry seems to reach a dead end. We can, however, compensate for the silence of Rabbinic sources by examining non-Rabbinic texts that ascribe normative significance both to the context in which one acquires food and to the words associated with that transaction.

One such text is Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians. Paul, drawing on traditional Jewish antipathy toward idolatry, instructs the Christ-believers of Corinth to abstain from food offered to idols. Paul then qualifies this prohibition, allowing his followers to "eat whatever is sold in the market without raising any question on the ground of consciousness." Paul also allows Christ-believers to attend meals at the homes of idolaters and eat the food there. "But," he says, "if someone says to you, 'this has been offered to the gods,' then do not eat it" (1 Cor. 10:25–28). The fact is, much of the food found in Greco-Roman markets and homes had been offered to the gods (Koch 1999; Smith 2003: 67–85). Paul effectively permits the consumption of food whose origins are potentially idolatrous, and he encourages Christ-believers to maintain the ambiguity of the food's origins by not asking questions. The prohibition against idol-food, he teaches, applies only when one is aware of the food's sacrificial origins.

Some Muslim jurists also advocate willful ignorance when obtaining potentially problematic foodstuffs, including cheese (Cook 1984; Freidenreich 2011: 169–174). A Shiʿi tradition reports that someone asked the Fifth Imām, Muḥammad al-Bāqir (d. 735), about the permissibility of cheese that non-Muslims made using rennet derived from improperly slaughtered animals, a forbidden ingredient. He said: "If this fact is known you may not eat of it, but if the cheese is anonymous and one cannot know who made it, and it is sold in a Muslim market, then eat it" (al-Nʿumān 1991: 2.126, §437). In related traditions, Muḥammad

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al-Bāqir specifically instructs Muslims not to ask questions when buying potentially problematic cheese, on the principle that what you do not know cannot hurt you. One report adds that he exclaimed, "I like cheese!" (al-Barqī 1951: 496, §600).

Paul and Muḥammad al-Bāqir advocate the same policy when it comes to potentially problematic food: if one is unaware of the problem and can contrive to remain ignorant of its existence, one is entitled to the benefit of the doubt. It is reasonable to suggest that this is what the term *ʿimʿum*, obfuscation, means in the Yerushalmi's discussion of gentile bread, even though there is no reason to presume any historical relationship between the "don't ask, don't tell" policies of the Sages, the Apostle, and the Fifth Imām (or, for that matter, the Clinton administration). This interpretation of *ʿimʿum* fits the semantic range of the term: by contriving to speak in such a manner that the gentile identity of the baker is never stated explicitly, one can maintain ambiguity regarding the origins of any given loaf and thus evade the prohibition against gentile bread. This interpretation also accounts for the various statements about the relevance of obfuscation to gentile bread, including the bread salesman limitation. In certain contexts, it is readily apparent who baked a particular loaf of bread. Bread salesmen, however, sold bread made by multiple bakers (Rosenfeld and Menirav 2005: 100–109). These salesmen, like the marketplaces to which Paul and Muḥammad al-Bāqir refer, sever the link between prepared foodstuffs and their preparers. The anonymity distinctive to retail trade facilitates efforts to maintain ambiguity regarding the origins of any given item of food.

Returning to our text from the Bavli, we are now better able to understand the implications of R. Ḥelbo's reference to bread salesmen. R. Ḥelbo, like R. Yaʿaqov bar Aḥa, not only restricts the permission of gentile bread to places where Jewish bread is unavailable, he stipulates that gentile bread may only be acquired in a context that obscures the identity of the baker. By using the term "bread salesman," R. Ḥelbo is able to ascribe this stipulation to Rabbi himself; recall that Rabbi's question was "Is there no bread salesman here?" Both R. Ḥelbo and R. Yoḥanan marshal the authority of their venerated predecessor even as they severely narrow the context in which his statements on the subject of gentile bread apply.

Analysis of the Bavli in an analytical context that encompasses Christian and Islamic as well as Rabbinic texts helps us better understand the logic that underlies the statements of R. Yoḥanan and R. Ḥelbo. This context also suggests possibilities for making sense of

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Rabbi's statement as recounted by R. Dimi. The exclamation, "How nice is this bread!," like Muḥammad al-Bāqir's expressed fondness for cheese, may reflect the motivating power of appetizing food. Perhaps we should also understand the question "Why did Sages see fit to prohibit it?" in light of the "don't ask, don't tell" principle: I don't see anything wrong with this loaf of bread, do you?

R. Yoḥanan and R. Ḥelbo, of course, would prefer that we interpreted Rabbi's permissive stance more narrowly. Our brief forays into Christian and Islamic literature reveal that these Sages are not the only authorities who narrow the contexts of existing norms in order to justify and mask their own legal innovations. Paul, we saw, limits the scope of the traditional prohibition against idol-food to food whose sacrificial origins are known. Muḥammad al-Bāqir offers a similar and equally unprecedented limitation to Islamic dietary prohibitions. By redefining the social contexts in which earlier statements of law apply, religious authorities of all stripes are able to express new ideas that run counter to established norms while making it seem as if no change to the law has actually occurred.

MANIPULATING RHETORICAL CONTEXTS

The named authorities in our Bavli pericope engage in discourse about the social contexts in which a received tradition about foreign bread applies. By crafting context-specific distinctions, these Sages seek to limit or reconfigure established norms about the permissibility of foreign bread. The anonymous redactors of the Bavli who put our pericope together employ a different approach to the challenge of making it seem as if earlier sources say something they do not in fact say. These redactors portray the named Sages as responding to concerns that are actually original to the redactors themselves by placing the statements of their predecessors within a new rhetorical context. We can better understand how this rhetorical sleight-of-hand works in the Bavli by first considering a clearer example drawn from Christian normative literature.

Paul's condemnation of food offered to idols makes no reference to Jewish rituals, and the historical Paul would never have defined Judaism as a form of idolatry. A Christian listening to John Chrysostom (d. 407), however, might reasonably conclude that Paul did just that. In the first of his *Discourses against the Jews*, preached in Antioch in 386, Chrysostom roots his vehement condemnation of Jewish rituals in a

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creative recontextualization of scriptural prooftexts, especially Paul's words to the Corinthians about food offered to idols.

> Paul said: "If others see you who have knowledge eating in the temple of an idol, might they not, since their consciousness is weak, be emboldened to eat food sacrificed to idols?" (1 Cor. 8.10) And I say: If others see you who have knowledge come into the synagogue and watch them blow trumpets, might they not, since their consciousness is weak, be emboldened to admire Jewish practices? (*Discourses* 1.5.7; see Harkins 1979)

Paul brands pagan ritual meals as "the table of demons" (1 Cor. 10:21); Chrysostom applies the same term to synagogue rituals. After all, he observes, "How can those who have set themselves in opposition to God be anything but worshippers of demons?" (*Discourses* 1.7.5). Given rhetoric like this, it is no surprise that during Chrysostom's lifetime bishops of Asia Minor and Western Syria forbade consumption of Jewish ritual foods, like unleavened bread, by analogy to the New Testament's prohibitions against idol-food (Freidenreich 2011: 118–123).

Through deft manipulation of Paul's words, Chrysostom portrays Judaism as tantamount to idolatry and he condemns Christians who attend Jewish rites as participants in a form of demonic worship anathema to Christianity. What makes this rhetoric so effective is that Chrysostom's assertions rest not on his own authority but rather on the much greater authority of Paul. By situating Paul's teachings and other scriptural prooftexts within his own anti-Jewish rhetorical framework, Chrysostom makes it seem as though the prophets and apostles share his virulent opposition to Judaism. This approach to using scripture as a means of constructing a Jewish foil to Christian identity, what Jeremy Cohen dubs "the hermeneutical Jew" (1999), is commonplace within early Christian literature and widely recognized by contemporary academics.

The redactors of the Bavli are no less masterful in their rhetorical genre than the "golden-tongued" orator Chrysostom is in his. Chrysostom presents earlier statements about idolatry in his own context of polemic against Judaism. The Bavli's redactors present earlier statements about gentile bread in their own context of polemic against intermarriage. The traditions we have examined about gentile bread make no reference to marriage, just as Paul makes no reference to Jewish rituals in his condemnation of food offered to idols. Indeed, no named Sage, whether in the Bavli or in any other Rabbinic text of late

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antiquity, expresses concern that eating bread baked by a non-Jew might result in marriage to a non-Jew.[5] This concern is expressed only by the Bavli's anonymous redactors, who deftly recontextualize earlier statements to make it seem as though these statements address concerns regarding marriage.

In the following translation of our primary pericope, words and sentences added by the redactors are underlined.

[A] R. Kahana said in the name of R. Yoḥanan: No court permitted [gentile] bread.

[B] Does this imply that someone did permit it? Yes, for when R. Dimi came [from Palestine], he said: Once Rabbi went out in the fields and a gentile brought him professionally baked bread prepared from a *se'ah* of flour. Rabbi said, "How nice is this bread—why did Sages see fit to prohibit it?"

[C] Why did Sages see fit to prohibit it!? Because of [concern about] marriage! Rather, why did Sages see fit to prohibit it in the field?

[D] The people thought that Rabbi had permitted the bread, but this is not the case: Rabbi did not permit the bread.

[E] R. Yosef (some say R. Shemu'el b. Yehudah) said: That was not what happened. Rather, once Rabbi went to a certain place and saw that bread was scarce for the disciples. He said, "Is there no bread salesman here?"

[F] The people thought he meant a gentile bread salesman, but he only meant a Jewish bread salesman.

[G] R. Ḥelbo said: Even for those who think [he referred to] a gentile bread salesman, this [permission] applies in places where there is no

[5]The sole apparent exception—"R. Yiṣḥaq said: They prohibited [gentile] bread because of their oil, and their oil because of their wine . . . and their wine because of their daughters . . ." (B. *'Avodah Zarah* 36b, Ms. JTS Rab. 15)—is not in fact relevant. Concern about marriage to gentile women is associated in this statement with wine, not bread. Zvi Arie Steinfeld (1996), moreover, argues persuasively that the clause about wine and daughters is not original to R. Yiṣḥaq's statement but rather constitutes a redactional addition. Named Sages, both in the Talmuds and in earlier works of Rabbinic literature, do indeed express concern that commensal intercourse with gentiles, especially when alcohol is involved, might result in sexual intercourse (Rosenblum 2010; Freidenreich 2011: 72–76). The Bavli's redactors, however, are the first to link this concern to gentile bread as a foodstuff.

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Jewish bread salesman, but not in places where there is a Jewish bread salesman.

[H] R. Yoḥanan said: Even for those who think that Rabbi permitted [gentile] bread, this applies in the fields but not in town.

[I] Why is this? Because of marriage. (B. ʿ*Avodah Zarah* 35b, Ms. JTS Rab. 15)

The redactors of this pericope split R. Yoḥanan's statement in half (lines A and H) and insert a number of original glosses (B, C, D, I). Through these actions, the redactors construct a new rhetorical context in which to understand the words of earlier authorities. The truncated statement of R. Yoḥanan with which the pericope begins declares flatly that no court permitted gentile bread, predisposing the audience to be skeptical about any account that relaxes the traditional prohibition. The redactors proceed to thoroughly undermine the permissive tradition cited by R. Dimi. In line C, they express shock at Rabbi's question about the rationale for prohibiting foreign bread, making it seem obvious that this prohibition has always been based on concern about marriage to gentiles. The redactors, following in the footsteps of R. Yoḥanan, limit the scope of Rabbi's question to "the fields." In its present context, however, this term refers not to a place without Jewish bread to eat but rather to a place without gentiles to marry. Line D, inspired by R. Yosef's claim about popular misunderstanding (F), insists that Rabbi in fact did not permit gentile bread at all, even in the fields. The redactors portray the second half of Rabbi Yoḥanan's statement (line H) as a response to R. Yosef's account (E) rather than to the account transmitted by R. Dimi, and they make it seem as if R. Yoḥanan as well as Rabbi is motivated by marriage-related concerns (I).

In sum, the redactors portray the prohibition of gentile bread as an essential bulwark against intermarriage. They understand bread not merely as a staple food or a symbolic manifestation of culture but as a metonym for sex. Fifth- and sixth-century Babylonian Sages were especially preoccupied by concerns regarding proper marriage partners (Kalmin 1999: 27–60). These concerns may well have motivated the redactors of the Bavli to understand Rabbinic discourse about foreign bread in an unprecedented light. Because of their fear of intermarriage, these redactors recontextualize earlier statements in order to undermine both the permissive statements of Rabbi and the very notion that one can safely permit foreign bread anywhere gentiles are present.

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Careful analysis of this pericope reveals a number of problems with this presentation of earlier statements. It is highly unlikely that R. Yoḥanan, a third-century Palestinian, responds to the account offered by R. Yosef, a fourth-century Babylonian. It is entirely implausible that "the fields" refers to a place without gentiles to marry: if there are no gentiles in the fields, who is supplying the gentile bread? The rhetoric of the redactors in lines C and D also seems to be an instance of protesting too much. And, of course, no named Sage makes any reference to intermarriage. Despite these flaws, however, the redactors' efforts to weave intermarriage into earlier discourse about foreign bread succeed. Normative Rabbinic tradition to this day reads the prohibition against foreign bread as a response to the threat posed by marriage to gentiles. Thus, for example, the most authoritative code of Jewish law declares flatly that "The Sages forbade eating the bread of idolatrous nations because of marriage" (*Shulḥan ʿArukh* YD 112.1). Only through an act of vertical comparison, in this case a comparison of the third- and fourth-century statements preserved in the Bavli and the approximately sixth-century redacted version of our pericope, can we appreciate the distinctive contribution that the Bavli's redactors made to the laws governing gentile bread. Placing the rhetorical activity of these redactors within an analytical context that includes Chrysostom's *Discourses against the Jews*, an act of diagonal comparison, enables us to see more clearly how rhetoric reshapes the meaning of statements by earlier authorities.

The technique that the Bavli's redactors use to weave intermarriage into a discussion that originally had nothing to do with the topic is effectively the same one we observed in Chrysostom's homily. Both place the authoritative statements of venerated predecessors in a wholly original rhetorical context, changing the meaning of those statements without altering their words. Chrysostom masks the originality of his anti-Jewish polemic by using Paul's language about the consciousness of the weak and the tables of demons to address Jewish rather than pagan rituals. Similarly, the Bavli's redactors mask the novelty of their intermarriage focus by employing the earlier town/field distinction to express this concern and by utilizing the existing misunderstanding argument to account for its supposed antiquity. Through rhetorical recontextualization of their sources, the redactors make it seem as though intermarriage had always been the motivating factor behind Rabbinic discourse about foreign bread.

Academic students of early Christianity are trained to see Chrysostom's rhetoric for what it is: prooftexts notwithstanding, Chrysostom expresses a new concept of Christian identity defined in

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antithetical opposition to Judaism. Academic students of Talmudic literature are only beginning to appreciate the ways in which the Bavli's redactors also advance their own normative agendas through the rhetorical recontextualization of earlier sources (e.g., Tucker 2008). By analyzing Talmudic discourse about gentile bread in light of Chrysostom's *Discourses against the Jews*, we can more easily recognize the role of the Bavli's redactors in reorienting the law and more fully appreciate the manipulation of context they employ in doing so.

THE IMPACT OF INTERPRETIVE CONTEXTS

A different kind of recontextualization underlies the final statement we examine about gentile bread. The Bavli pericope in which this statement appears discusses the related prohibition against foods cooked by gentiles and seeks to clarify which acts put food into this prohibited category.

> A Jew may place meat on the coals, and even if a gentile comes and flips [the meat] before the Jew returns from the synagogue or house of study he need not be concerned. . . . Rabbah bar Bar Ḥannah (and some say: R. Aḥa bar Bar Ḥannah) said in the name of R. Yoḥanan, "Whether a gentile places [the meat] and a Jew flips it or a Jew places it and a gentile flips it, it is permitted. It is not prohibited unless [the cooking is] at the hand of a gentile from start to finish." Ravina said, "The law is: bread which a Jew bakes in an oven which a gentile kindled, bread which a gentile bakes in an oven which a Jew kindled, and bread which a gentile bakes in an oven which a gentile kindled but a Jew came and added a wood-chip [to the fire]—these are all permitted." (B. *'Avodah Zarah* 38a–b, Vilna ed.)

Ravina, a fifth-century Babylonian Sage, does not question the validity of the prohibition against gentile bread, but he does establish an unprecedented and exceptionally broad definition of what qualifies as "Jewish bread." So long as a Jew participated in the baking process in some way, however minimal, the bread is "Jewish." There is no reason to presume that Ravina's definition is motivated by concern about the scarcity of bread baked solely by Jews or, for that matter, a desire to eat appetizing bread. It seems clear that Ravina is not preoccupied by concerns about intermarriage either, as he encourages Jewish–gentile interaction over food.

The normative Rabbinic tradition has understood Ravina's statement as if he seeks to offer a practical means for employing non-Jewish

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labor in a bakery that sells bread to Jews (e.g., *Shulḥan ʿArukh* YD 112.9). In fact, this statement governs the way that many kosher bakeries operate today. The entire staff may be gentile, but if a Jew turns on the oven, every loaf of bread baked in it may be eaten even by those who adhere strictly to the prohibition against gentile bread. One modern equivalent of "adding a wood-chip" is for a Jew to install a heat-emitting light bulb in the oven: until the bulb burns out, that Jew has contributed to the baking process (Winkler 1995: 39).

This traditional interpretation notwithstanding, I would suggest that Ravina does not intend to offer practical advice to bakery owners. Rather, his statement about gentile bread addresses hypothetical borderline cases that serve to clarify legal distinctions.[6] Ravina is interested in borderline cases because he is speaking in the context of the Babylonian academy, training the next generation of Rabbinic Sages in a discourse that possesses the characteristics which José Ignacio Cabezón associates with "scholasticism" (1998: 4–6). The pedagogical nature of this type of legal discourse, which appears in a variety of historically unrelated intellectual traditions, is especially apparent in the following example, drawn from Islamic sources.

The Qur'an permits Muslims to hunt for food so long as they are not engaged in the pilgrimage (Q. 5.4). Sunni and Shi'i jurists agree that Muslims may not consume the meat of animals slaughtered by Zoroastrians, including animals killed through hunting. But what happens if a Muslim and a Zoroastrian go hunting together? Islamic authorities devote considerable attention to this question in various permutations and, in the process, take Islamic law into uncharted territory. Consider the following passage by the medieval philosopher-jurist Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (d. 1111), which constitutes more than half of this work's discussion about the requirements governing the identity of the butcher.

> If a Zoroastrian and a Muslim are partners in the act of slaughter, it is prohibited. The same applies if each sends an arrow or a hunting dog at a game animal and both contribute to its death. But if one of them strikes the animal first, beginning the act of slaughter, that determines the legal status of the meat. If the quarry runs from the Muslim's dog but the Zoroastrian's dog drives it back so that the Muslim's dog kills it, this is permitted because the assistance provided by driving the quarry back is not legally significant. The quarry's meat is legally

[6]Elizabeth Shanks Alexander probes the function of such cases in earlier Rabbinic literature (2003: 197–200).

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> property of the Muslim from the moment proper slaughter begins. Therefore, if the Muslim's dog exhausts the quarry but, while it is still alive, the Zoroastrian's dog reaches it and kills it, the meat is considered carrion and the Zoroastrian is liable to the Muslim for spoiling his property. (al-Ghazālī 1997: 7.702)

No hunter could reasonably keep these cases straight in the midst of the hunt, let alone all of the variants discussed by other jurists. By the Middle Ages, moreover, there were not very many Zoroastrians to go hunting with in any case. We would, therefore, be mistaken if we understood these jurists as attempting to offer practical advice to Muslim hunters. These questions serve a pedagogical function for students of Islamic law: by addressing scenarios that fall on the border between permitted and prohibited, they flesh out, so to speak, the definition of "game killed by a Muslim" and "game killed by a Zoroastrian." These borderline cases thus allow for a more precise understanding of the law that permits eating meat from the former category but not the latter.[7] Specifically, al-Ghazālī's cases teach that the act of slaughter must be performed solely by a Muslim, that this act is considered to occur the moment at which the fatal blow is delivered, that assisting acts are of no legal consequence, and that the act of exhausting a game animal renders that animal the property of the person responsible for such an act.

Similarly, Ravina's scenarios about joint baking serve to clarify the definition of "gentile bread." This term, according to Ravina, only refers to bread baked entirely by gentiles: any involvement by a Jew, even if that involvement was as minimal as adding a wood-chip to the fire during the baking process, renders the bread "Jewish." Earlier authorities address unintended instances of joint Jewish–gentile food preparation and instances in which a Jew directly acts upon a foodstuff, while Ravina addresses intentional collaboration and envisions a situation in which the Jew is responsible neither for kindling the oven nor for putting the bread into it. Nevertheless, by the norms of scholastic legal discourse, Ravina's statement does not constitute an innovation because it builds upon established precedent. I do not think it is coincidental that Ravina is among the Rabbinic virtuosos credited with finding Biblical proof for the purity of swarming creatures (B. *ʿEruvin* 13b).

[7]The same, I would argue, may be said regarding Rabbinic discussions of joint animal slaughter (e.g., Tosefta *Ḥullin* 1.2–3), which serve to clarify the distinction between animals slaughtered by Jews and those slaughtered by gentiles. The pedagogical orientation of these discussions, however, is less obvious than that of al-Ghazālī's statements regarding joint hunting.

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In the first pericope we examined, the redactors of the Bavli manipulate the rhetorical context of earlier traditions so that they seem to address concerns about intermarriage. Ravina also makes an old law say something new by situating the received tradition in a new context, but that context is interpretive rather than rhetorical, and Ravina's agenda is pedagogical, not practical. The very act of subjecting a law to analysis oriented toward finely tuned categorical distinctions naturally produces interpretations that would surprise earlier, less precise jurists. One might even say that Ravina's scholastic interpretation subverts the law it seeks to explain by carving out a significant loophole in the law's practical applicability. After all, hardly any commercial bread on the U.S. market certified as *pas yisroel*, "bread baked by Jews," was ever touched by a Jew: a Jew simply turned on the oven (or screwed in a light bulb). Perhaps, however, we should have expected that initially symbolic prohibitions against the preparation of food by foreigners would ultimately be evaded through purely symbolic acts of Jewish food preparation.

DIFFERENCES ALONG THE DIAGONAL

We have examined three different methods by which Talmudic Sages derive innovative conclusions from their sources while making it seem as if nothing has changed. These methods all hinge on the manipulation of context. R. Yoḥanan and R. Ḥelbo redefine the social context in which Rabbi's statements of law apply, the redactors of the Bavli situate earlier statements in an original rhetorical context, and Ravina analyzes an earlier law within a new interpretive context. In each case, we placed Talmudic discourse not only within the historical context in which it was produced or the traditional context in which it continues to be studied, but also within a broader analytical context that incorporates relevant Christian and Islamic texts. The similarities we observed among these sources by means of diagonal comparison enabled us to compensate for the lack of relevant evidence in Rabbinic literature and to perceive rhetorical and interpretive techniques that we might otherwise have missed. Perhaps of greater significance, however, are the differences between Rabbinic texts about gentile bread and their Christian and Islamic counterparts, differences that only become apparent through the process of diagonal comparison. These differences offer especially valuable insights into the way Talmudic Sages thought about adherents of other religions.

Paul, instructing his Corinthian followers to abstain from food offered to idols, focuses not on the food but rather on the idolatry. "Flee from the worship of idols," he cries, portraying participation in

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idolatrous rites as anathema to participation in the community of Christ (1 Cor. 10:14). Paul, however, sees nothing wrong with the food itself, agreeing with his Corinthian interlocutors that the act of sacrifice has no objective impact on the food (1 Cor. 10:19). For that reason, Paul is happy to permit his followers to eat food they do not know to be sacrificial: what matters to Paul is not the objective nature of the food but rather the subjective practice of eating food known to be linked to idolatry. Chrysostom differs from Paul in that he portrays Judaism as tantamount to idolatry, but both emphasize that Christians must avoid any association with the abhorrent beliefs and behaviors ascribed to religious foreigners. Indeed, both Paul and Chrysostom seek to define Christian identity in contradistinction to a pejoratively constructed other. Prohibitions against food associated with foreign rituals, whether pagan or Jewish, express Christian condemnation of the religious traditions that lie behind these rituals.

Islamic legal discourse about meat prepared by foreigners focuses not on the behavior of the preparer but rather on her or his religious identity. It is telling that the relevant sources consistently appear within the framework of laws that address the necessary characteristics of the butcher. The difference between permitted and prohibited game in the scenarios discussed by al-Ghazālī stems not from the way in which the animal was killed but rather from the identity of the hunter directly responsible for its death. Discussions of proper animal slaughter also focus primarily on the identity of the butcher. Sunnis and Shiʿis agree that Muslims may not consume the meat of animals killed by Zoroastrians but disagree sharply over whether Muslims may eat meat prepared by Jewish or Christian butchers. This debate reflects two competing approaches to defining the identity of Islam in relation to other religions. Sunni authorities affirm the basic affinity between believers in Muḥammad's revelation and those who revere prior revelations; for that reason, Sunnis permit eating the meat of animals slaughtered by Jews and Christians. Shiʿi jurists, in contrast, use the prohibition of such meat to emphasize the fundamental distinction between the "party of truth" and all who espouse false beliefs, a group that often includes Sunnis (Freidenreich 2011: 144–150, 157–163).

Christian and Islamic discourse about the permissibility of food associated with foreigners seeks to define the identity of insiders in relation to, or contradistinction with, outsiders. Talmudic discourse about gentile bread, in contrast, pays hardly any attention to the gentiles themselves. Rabbinic Sages focus on the bread, not on the identity of the baker or his religious beliefs. All of the opinions expressed in our first pericope, after all, address the contexts in which a loaf of gentile

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bread is acquired and pay no attention at all to the gentile who baked the bread. Even the redactors concerned about intermarriage focus their attention on gentile bread, not on gentile women. The gentile baker in Ravina's scenarios is important only by virtue of his performance of tasks that the Jewish baker does not perform. Chrysostom and other Church Fathers imagine Jews as "anti-Christians," while Islamic authorities debate the degree to which Jews and Christians are "sub-Muslims." From the perspective of the Sages whose attitudes we have been exploring, gentiles are simply and literally "non-Jews." As such, the identity, beliefs, and practices of gentiles merit little attention from Sages focused solipsistically on their own community and their own set of sacred traditions.

Implicit in Talmudic discourse about gentile bread is the notion that Judaism alone matters. These discussions define Jews as those who fastidiously observe and, especially, vigorously interpret divinely ordained classifications of foodstuffs. The way the Sages think about dietary laws seems to be strongly influenced by the food-specific orientation of Biblical dietary law. For the Sages, what really matters is not the foreigners but rather the food.

In my opinion, this insight into Rabbinic thought is the most valuable dividend of employing diagonal comparisons when reading Talmudic texts. Most of the arguments presented in this article could be made without recourse to Islamic or Christian sources: comparison provides an especially helpful lens through which to interpret Talmudic texts, but the merit of the resulting interpretation stands or falls solely on the strength of its ability to explain those texts themselves. Only by reading non-Rabbinic sources, however, can we become aware of "the dogs that don't bark" in Rabbinic literature: the assumptions that are so fundamental to Rabbinic thought that they are never expressed (Doniger 1998: 33, drawing on Sherlock Holmes). The study of Christian and Islamic discourse about the food of foreigners enables us to recognize a distinctive and significant element of Rabbinic attitudes toward non-Jews.

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