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CHAPTER 25

DIETARY LAW

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If the term *Abrahamic* has any substantive meaning when applied to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, it emphasizes certain affinities among these religious traditions while downplaying both other affinities and also the distinctions among these traditions. One could, after all, reasonably refer to these three religions as *Near Eastern*, a label that highlights their emergence and development within a common geographical and cultural region. Until recently, it was customary within academia to define these religions as *western*, a term that is not only broadly geographical but also and more significantly a nod to the profound influence of the Greek philosophical tradition on intellectual life within all three communities. A relatively new trend is to examine Judaism, Christianity, and Islam as *Mediterranean* religions, an approach that highlights the impact of that region's distinctive network of commercial, cultural, and intellectual exchange, especially during the Middle Ages. Alternatively, one can choose to emphasize criteria that exclude one tradition or another, such as a claim of affinity with biblical Israel (excluding Islam), a radically monotheist theology (excluding Christianity), or universal and missionary aspirations (excluding Judaism).

The term *Abrahamic* calls to mind two interrelated sets of affinities. The first is reverence for Abraham and, more broadly, for the myths, heroes, concepts, values, and norms found within the Hebrew Bible. As such, *Abrahamic* serves as a more generic substitute for *Judaeo-Christian*, another term that emphasizes the shared scriptural heritage of distinct religions. The second affinity highlighted by the term *Abrahamic* is a claim to descent, biological or spiritual, from Abraham. This affinity, which implies a familial relationship between Jews, Christians, and Muslims, probably accounts for the rise in popularity of *Abrahamic* among those who seek to overcome hostilities between members of the Judaeo-Christian traditions and contemporary Muslims. Unlike the geographic monikers mentioned above, *Abrahamic* bears a valence that can inspire present-day Jews, Christians, and Muslims to work toward a more harmonious future.

Examination of Jewish, Christian, and Islamic dietary law affords a valuable opportunity to assess the utility of the term *Abrahamic* in the academic study of pre-modern

sources from these three religions. The assessment that follows proceeds along two tracks. It first probes the degree to which their common biblical heritage accounts for food restrictions central to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. These traditions do share a number of food practices in common with one another and with those found in the Hebrew Bible, but the differences are arguably more profound than the similarities. Indeed, all three traditions depart in significant ways from biblical dietary norms, both because each tradition reveres its own distinctive scripture and because of interpretations and innovations that developed after the biblical period. This chapter then assesses the utility of the term *Abrahamic* by examining the ways in which food restrictions reflect traditional approaches to conceptualizing the relationships between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Jewish, Christian, and Islamic laws regarding food associated with members of other religions demonstrate that the pre-modern authorities who speak for these three traditions do not see themselves or their counterparts within an Abrahamic paradigm.

The first half of this chapter examines the fate of the Hebrew Bible's dietary laws within the Abrahamic religions. It addresses in turn three aspects of biblical dietary law: the prohibition against consuming the meat of certain animal species, the prohibition against consuming meat whose blood was not drained, and the prohibition against boiling a young goat in its mother's milk. We will also consider Islam's prohibition of alcohol, despite the fact that this prohibition is not rooted in biblical dietary law. Rigorous adherence to the biblicism implicit in the Abrahamic paradigm, after all, would result in the failure to address an important aspect of Islamic food practices. As we will see, such rigour would also do an injustice to important aspects of Jewish and Christian practices. A focus on common origins alone obscures the divergent ways in which all three Abrahamic religions understand and apply biblical material within their own communities.

The second half of this chapter explores Jewish, Christian, and Islamic norms regarding the food of members of other religions, with particular attention to the conceptions of foreign religions implicit in these norms. Most prominent among these norms is the prohibition against food associated with idolatry. Jewish, Christian, and Islamic authorities alike apply this prohibition and others not only to the food of pagans but also to one another's food. Pre-modern religious authorities employ a variety of distinct paradigms for conceptualizing the relationships between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, and for evaluating the reverence by religious foreigners for biblical norms. These paradigms, which clash with the logic of familial relationship that underlies the contemporary concept of Abrahamic religions, bolster particular worldviews that promote the supremacy of one's own religious tradition at the expense of its peers. The diversity and ideological baggage of these pre-modern approaches to relating Judaism, Christianity, and Islam render them unsuitable for use within the academy. Ironically, the value of the term *Abrahamic* for contemporary scholarship rests precisely in its incongruity with the paradigms traditionally employed by Jews, Christians, and Muslims themselves. The more one focuses on the meaning of the term, however, the less useful it becomes.

Biblical Dietary Law within the Abrahamic Religions

Laws Governing Particular Animal Species

The most widely familiar of the Hebrew Bible's dietary laws, from antiquity to the present day, are those that address the permissibility of eating meat from various types of animal species. Land animals must have split hoofs and chew their cud, characteristics that ensure the animal is a herbivore and exclude such species as pigs and camels. Water animals must have fins and scales: thus, most kinds of fish are permitted but not other forms of seafood. The Torah also addresses the permissibility of eating various types of birds and insects (Lev. 11: 1–23, 41–2; Deut. 14: 3–20; see Milgrom 1991: 718–36). These regulations constitute the core of Jewish dietary law to the present day. Christian and Islamic authorities, in contrast, do not believe that members of their communities ought to observe the Hebrew Bible's strictures regarding forbidden animal species even though they regard these laws as divine in origin. These understandings result from reading the dietary laws of the Torah within the framework of the Christian Bible or the Quran. To speak of an Abrahamic scriptural heritage uniting Judaism, Christianity, and Islam is overly simplistic: members of these religions revere three distinct scriptures and therefore understand the shared content of these scriptures in different ways.

Consider the evolution of attitudes toward biblical dietary laws within the earliest history of Christianity. Jews at the time of Jesus commonly regarded adherence to biblical dietary laws as a primary marker of Jewish identity and, indeed, as a litmus test: Jews alone followed these laws, and those Jews who wilfully rejected them were deemed apostates (Barclay 1998: 91–2). Jesus and his disciples, all Jews, adhered to biblical dietary laws as well, and some of these disciples believed that non-Jews wishing to join the community of Christ ought to become Jews and observe biblical law in its entirety. Paul and other communal leaders, however, exempted Gentile believers from this obligation; indeed, Paul explicitly permitted Gentile believers to eat all kinds of food (Rom. 14: 2–3, 14; see Barclay 1996). Paul's letters contain no instructions regarding whether Jewish believers in Christ should continue to adhere to biblical dietary laws, but circumstantial evidence strongly suggests that he approved of such behaviour. As scholars now recognize, Paul took for granted that observant Jews have a place within the nascent Christian community, and biblical dietary laws were a core component of Jewish practice. Whereas other Jewish writers of his era seized upon biblical dietary practices as a marker of one's Jewishness, however, Paul believed that adherence to these norms or lack thereof should in no way affect one's status as a believer in Christ.

Within a few generations, those who spoke for the church regularly disparaged abstention from the meat of specific animal species, like pork. They interpreted the Old Testament's dietary norms through the lens of post-Pauline verses in the New Testament, such as the report that Jesus 'declared all foods pure' (Mark 7: 19; see Räisänen

1982), and various statements pseudonymously ascribed to Paul, including 'for the pure all things are pure' (Titus 1: 15) and 'everything created by God is good' (1 Tim. 4: 4). The second-century *Letter to Barnabas*, for example, explains that Moses' teachings about food were intended solely to convey spiritual lessons about morality, 'but because of their fleshly desires [the Jews] received his words as if he were actually speaking about food' (10.9). Church fathers were not the first to offer moralistic allegorical interpretations of biblical dietary laws (see e.g. the second-century BCE *Letter of Aristeas*), but they were the first to claim that these laws should not be followed literally. These authorities understood adherence to biblical dietary laws, by Jews and others who followed so-called 'Jewish' practices, as reflecting a failure to understand not only the significance of Christ but also of God's original revelation to Moses. These failures, after all, are deeply intertwined: only through the lens of the New Testament (Christians assert) can one can truly understand the meaning of the Hebrew Bible itself. The Jewish and Christian Bibles contain many of the same words, but those words convey very different messages because of the scriptural contexts in which they are read.

The Quran understands biblical laws forbidding the consumption of certain animal species literally, as do Jewish interpreters. The Torah describes these laws as a manifestation of Israel's holiness (e.g. Lev. 11: 45). The Quran, in contrast, portrays them as punishments for the transgressions of the Children of Israel (Q. 4: 160, 6: 146, 16: 116; similar portrayals also appear in early Christian sources, e.g. Aphrahat, *Demonstration* 15.3, dated 344 CE). As such, there is no reason for non-Jews to adhere to biblical dietary law by abstaining from such foods as camel meat. Muslims need only abstain from pork, which is forbidden within the Quran itself (Q. 2: 173, 5: 3, 6: 145, 16: 115), and from particular species enumerated in *ḥadīth* and in the literature of the various legal schools (Cook 1986). Notice that whereas Jews and Christians claim the mantle of biblical Israel and regard themselves as faithfully adhering to biblical dietary law (either literally or spiritually), Muslims do neither. Instead, they reject both the ultimate authority of the Bible and the belief that Israel constitutes a uniquely holy or particularly pious nation (Freidenreich 2010b: 5–12).

The Quran and subsequent Sunni works portray Islamic dietary law as a golden mean between the unfounded practices of polytheists and the burdensome obligations with which God punished the Jews. These sources employ rhetoric about biblical dietary law to emphasize both the authenticity of God's revelation to Moses and the fact that this revelation has been superseded (Freidenreich 2011: 131–43, 184–90). This rhetoric also highlights the leniency of God's final revelation relative to prior versions. Indeed, Islamic descriptions of biblical dietary law, based on an interpretation of quranic verses rather than on the Hebrew Bible itself, are more restrictive than those found in the Bible or subsequent Jewish practice (Maghen 2006: 146–60). Jews, along with the dietary norms imputed to them, function as a negative foil against which to define not only Christian identity but Islamic identity as well. The scriptural frameworks distinctive to each of these traditions result in understandings of biblical dietary law self-consciously at odds with those espoused within a sister Abrahamic religion.

Christian and Islamic scriptures contain passages that shape the manner in which laws forbidding consumption of various animal species are understood. The absence of these passages from the Jewish Bible, however, does not imply that Jews necessarily understand biblical dietary law in the same manner as biblical Israelites. After all, the precise meaning of these laws is sometimes ambiguous. How, for example, should one apply the biblical injunctions forbidding consumption of specific species of birds, listed without any explanation (Lev. 11: 13–19; Deut. 14: 12–18)? Rabbinic authorities derive categorical principles from the Torah's list and then apply these principles to determine the status of unmentioned species (*Mishnah Ḥullin* 3.6). Karaite authorities, in contrast, hold that neither the identity of the forbidden birds nor the rationale underlying these prohibitions can be ascertained with certainty. Karaites therefore permit only those birds whose consumption is explicitly approved within other biblical texts (Frank 2004: 39–61). This difference, which helped to distinguish rabbinic and Karaite Jews one from the other during the Middle Ages, highlights the role of tradition-specific interpretation within all scriptural religions.

Interpretation results not only from ambiguity within scripture itself but also from the changing context in which scripture is read. Over the centuries, Jews have developed a variety of justifications for adherence to these laws that augment the rationale found in the Bible itself: 'I the LORD am your God who has set you apart from other peoples. So you shall set apart the pure animal from the impure, the impure bird from the pure . . . You shall be holy to Me' (Lev. 20: 24–6). One finds, for example, portrayals of biblical law as conveying moral lessons (e.g. *Letter to Aristeas* 128–71) or promoting a healthy diet (e.g. Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed* 3.48). Both of these interpretations reflect the influence of Greek thought on post-biblical Judaism.

Portrayals of biblical dietary laws as setting Jews apart from all other people in their morality or physical health complement the Torah's own claim that these laws set Israel apart as uniquely holy and Godlike in their behaviour. (Notice that these binary conceptions of Jews and non-Jews leave no room for distinguishing Christians and Muslims from adherents of non-Abrahamic religions.) In other cases, however, the interpretations and practices espoused within Abrahamic religions on account of post-biblical developments depart radically from or even directly contradict the dietary norms established within biblical literature. This dynamic can be seen with respect to the Latin Christian practice of consuming blood, the Jewish injunction to separate meat from dairy, and the Islamic prohibition of wine and other alcohol.

The Blood Taboo

Ingesting blood ranks among the foremost taboos within the Hebrew Bible. This prohibition, which refers primarily to eating meat from which blood was not drained rather than to drinking liquid blood, is the only law in the Torah that explicitly applies not only to Israelites but to all of humanity (Gen. 9: 3–6; Lev. 17: 10–14; cf. Deut. 12: 16, 23–5). Underlying the importance ascribed to this rule is the concept that blood constitutes the seat of life itself: just as humans must not take the life of fellow human beings, they also must not ingest the life of the animals that God has allowed them to kill (Milgrom 1991: 704–13).

The universality of the Hebrew Bible's blood prohibition probably accounts for the declaration by leaders of the nascent Christian community that even Gentile believers in Christ must abstain both from blood and from the meat of strangled animals (Acts 15: 28). The prohibition of these foodstuffs also figures prominently in the Quran (Q. 2: 173, 5: 3, 6: 145, 16: 115). Rabbinic law preserves the blood taboo as well and lists consumption of bloody meat—albeit solely from a living animal—among the norms binding upon all humankind (Novak 1983: 239–54).

Jewish, Christian, and Islamic sources also attest to the requirement that slaughter be performed by means of slitting the throat with a sharp knife so as to ensure that the animal's blood drains out. The norms of butchery employed within these communities, including those of eastern Christians (Barhebraeus, *Nomocanon*, ch. 35, composed *c.*1264–86), were in fact similar enough that many Sunni authorities regarded them as functionally equivalent (Freidenreich 2011: 142, 197–203). The close similarities in the mechanics of slaughter enjoined by all three traditions as well as in the Semitic terminology used to describe these mechanics suggest that religious authorities drew upon a common Near Eastern method of animal slaughter. This method may well have been employed in biblical times as well, but it is never mandated in the Hebrew Bible; the diffusion of this practice within the Abrahamic religions, therefore, is not directly related to their shared reverence for biblical norms.

The fate of the blood taboo within the Latin Christian tradition attests dramatically to the difference between Abrahamic food practices and those enjoined within biblical literature. Despite the fact that the Hebrew Bible regards consumption of blood as morally equivalent to murder and adultery (e.g. Ezek. 33: 25–6), and despite the reiteration of the blood taboo within the New Testament itself, western Christians ultimately came to regard this prohibition as no longer binding. This transformation was instigated in the late fourth century by Augustine, who asserted that the Apostolic Decree (Acts 15: 28) only forbade consumption of blood and meat containing blood as a temporary measure intended to bridge the gap between Jewish and Gentile members of the nascent Christian community. Augustine, seeking to counter claims that the Bible supports the restrictive food practices endorsed by Manichaeans, instead privileged Jesus' teaching, 'It is not what enters your mouth that defiles but what comes out of it' (Matt. 15: 11; cf. Mark 7: 15). True Christians, Augustine taught, follow Christ by consuming anything nutritious (*Answer to Faustus* 32.13). Although many in the West continued to follow the Apostolic Decree's blood prohibition for some time, by the twelfth century Augustine's interpretation was universally accepted among Catholics (and, later, Protestants). During the transitional period, proponents of the Augustinian position labelled those who continued to follow traditional Christian dietary practices as 'Judaizers' (e.g. Vega 1941).

The history of the blood taboo in the Latin West offers a clear example of the way in which Christian authorities sometimes depart radically from biblical norms in response to post-biblical developments, even as they affirm their reverence for scripture by using proof texts to justify these departures. This dynamic, also attested in Judaism and Islam, reflects the nature of scripture not merely as a point of origin but, more fundamentally, as 'a relation between a people and a text' (Smith 1993: 18). In its orientation toward the shared biblical roots of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, the Abrahamic paradigm is liable to draw attention away from the evolving meaning of biblical sources as understood within three distinct interpretative traditions.

Not Mixing Meat and Dairy

'You shall not boil a kid in its mother's milk,' the Hebrew Bible declares on three occasions (Exod. 23: 19, 34: 26; Deut. 14: 21). None of these passages provides a rationale for this prohibition against a specific manner of cooking the meat of young goats; among the most plausible explanations are the promotion of humanitarian values and the separation of life-giving forces from processes associated with death (Haran 1979; Milgrom 1991: 737–42). This prohibition finds no expression in Christian or Islamic food norms. Rabbinic Judaism, however, employs this set of verses to justify an extensive and unprecedented set of laws separating meat from dairy (Kraemer 2007). Not only is it forbidden for Jews to cook the meat of an animal in the milk of its own mother, or even in milk from the same species, Jews also may not consume any kind of meat with any kind of dairy (e.g. chicken and cheese). Rabbinic law, moreover, requires that pots, dishes, and utensils used with meat may not be used with dairy and imposes a waiting period between the consumption of meat and the consumption of dairy. The biblical Abraham, who served both milk and meat to his guests (Gen. 18: 8), would be flummoxed by these unfamiliar regulations. David C. Kraemer (2007: 46) aptly describes the separation of meat and dairy not as the outcome of scriptural exegesis but rather as 'a new Jewish eating practice, one invented by the early rabbis and elaborated, slowly and variously, by generations of their disciples'. This new practice bolsters the distinction between Jews and non-Jews made manifest through Jewish adherence to biblical dietary law while also serving to distinguish followers of the rabbis from other Jews; both of these distinctions play prominent roles within rabbinic discourse about food and identity (Rosenblum 2010). Indeed, rabbinic Jews who wished to drive a wedge between themselves and the Karaites sought a ban of excommunication 'against the eaters of meat with milk' (Rustow 2008: 209).

Of all Jewish dietary norms, those regarding the mixture of meat and dairy arguably have the greatest impact on the daily life of rabbinic Jews. Nevertheless, references to this practice are rare in Christian and Islamic rhetoric about Jews. This rhetoric focuses on what Jeremy Cohen dubs 'hermeneutical Jews', a construct derived not from social

interaction with actual Jews but rather from theologically oriented engagement with sacred texts, especially the Bible. Jews function within Christian and Islamic discourse alike as 'living letters of scripture', to use the words of Bernard of Clairvaux (Cohen 1999: 2). Neither the Bible nor the Quran addresses the anti-mixture practices of the Jews, so Christians and Muslims ignore these practices as well. As we saw with respect to Latin Christian norms regarding blood, however, biblical texts alone do not encapsulate the fullness of the dietary practices observed by members of the Abrahamic religions. This dynamic, evident in rabbinic strictures regarding meat and dairy, is even more readily apparent with respect to Islam's prohibition against consuming alcohol.

Wine and Other Alcohol

Biblical literature takes for granted that wine played an important role in both cultic rituals and everyday life in ancient Israel (Broshi 1984). Priests may not consume wine or other alcoholic beverages while serving in the shrine, apparently because it is liable to impair their ability to perform their duties (Lev. 10: 8–11). Nazirites, who vow to observe restrictions similar to yet more onerous than those imposed on priests, may not consume alcohol or any grape product (Num. 6: 3–4). Ordinary Israelites and off-duty priests, however, are free to enjoy alcohol. Wine, moreover, is regularly offered in libation on the altar in the context of various sacrificial rites. Non-legal biblical literature portrays wine as a regular part of the diet, a source of joy, and a gift of God (e.g. Ps. 104: 15).

The ritual function of wine persists within Christianity through the use of wine in the Eucharistic sacrifice, although the centrality of wine in the ritual was not a given in early Christian communities with ascetic tendencies (McGowan 1999). Wine also plays an important role within rabbinic Judaism through its use as a physical anchor for the performance of abstract actions, such as the sanctification of holidays or the pronouncement of wedding blessings. (On Jewish and Christian concern about wine offered in libation to idols, see the next section.) The importance of wine within Judaism and Christianity reflects its centrality in the diet and culture of the Graeco-Roman world: wine, along with bread and olive oil, was a dietary staple in the Mediterranean region and a key component in civilized dining (Smith 2003: 28–31).

The status of wine within the Islamic tradition is quite different, owing both to the different cultural milieu in which Islam emerged and its distinctive scriptural canon. Although the Quran describes the intoxicants derived from grapes and dates positively (16: 67), it also warns that the harm of wine outweighs its benefits (2: 219), forbids praying while intoxicated (4: 43), and describes wine as a Satanic abomination from which believers should abstain (5: 90–1). *Ḥadīth* collections, meanwhile, are consistent in their condemnations of alcohol (Kueny 2001). Classical exegetes explain that God's revelations on the subject of wine grew more restrictive over time, with the absolute prohibition last and therefore uniquely authoritative (McAuliffe 1984: 159–67). The

scope of this prohibition also grew over time, ultimately encompassing not only wine but also other alcoholic beverages and foodstuffs containing alcohol, even in quantities that do not result in intoxication (Haider 2013). Similarly, the prohibition applies not just to consuming alcohol but also to producing or selling it or even, according to some authorities, patronizing an establishment in which others are consuming alcohol. The joys of wine, according to the Islamic tradition, are reserved for heaven alone (McAuliffe 1984: 167–73). If the term *Abrahamic* refers to reverence for myths, heroes, concepts, values, and norms found within the Hebrew Bible, there is nothing Abrahamic about this important aspect of Islamic dietary law.

All three Abrahamic religions display a reverence of sorts for the dietary laws found within the Hebrew Bible. Nevertheless, the food restrictions endorsed by Jewish, Christian, and Islamic authorities differ both one from another and each, in various ways, from the evident meaning of the biblical text itself. These authorities, moreover, highlight such differences as a means of bolstering their own tradition's distinctiveness and disparaging adherents of other traditions. Attention to these divergences enriches our understanding of the evolution that has occurred within Jewish, Christian, and Islamic food practices. To the extent that the Abrahamic paradigm is employed as a means of grouping these traditions together for the purpose of assessing their differences as well as their similarities, it serves a useful function. The paradigm becomes problematic, however, if its orientation toward a point of common origin draws attention away from the different contexts in which each tradition interprets biblical source material, from elements of these traditions that originate outside the Bible, or from the manner in which each tradition differentiates itself from others.

The Food of Foreigners within the Abrahamic Religions

The term *Abrahamic* suggests not only a relationship with the content of the Hebrew Bible but also a sense of kinship that binds Jews, Christians, and Muslims one to another through their common biological or spiritual ancestor. Such a notion, although popular and arguably beneficial in contemporary society, finds little support in the traditional sources of Judaism, Christianity, or Islam. The authorities who spoke for these religions in pre-modern times rarely employed the Abrahamic paradigm when describing the relationships among these traditions, and when they did make reference to Abraham it was to claim the patriarch for themselves alone (Hughes 2012: 34–46). As regulations governing the food of religious foreigners attest, these authorities often did not place the Abrahamic religions within a single category at all. The methods of classification they employed, we will see, emphasize characteristics unrelated to Abrahamic ancestry and serve to reinforce ideas particular to each tradition's approach to

claiming superiority over foreigners. (The subject matter surveyed in the present section is addressed in greater detail in Freidenreich 2011.)

Food Offered to Idols

All three Abrahamic religions—but not the Hebrew Bible itself—portray Abraham as an uncompromising monotheistic opponent of idolatry (see the chapter by Reuven Firestone in this volume). Similarly, all three religions strongly prohibit the consumption of food offered in idolatrous sacrifices, even though no such prohibition appears within the text of the Hebrew Bible. The Torah forbids Israelites from offering sacrifices to beings other than God and warns that eating food sacrificed by foreigners will lead Israelites down the path toward idolatry. The condemnation of eating such food, however, first appears in works from the final centuries before the common era. The authors of these works lived in a Hellenistic society in which Jews were invited, encouraged, and on rare occasions required to participate in Graeco-Roman cultic practices. Because these authors understood the consumption of food offered to idols as a paradigmatic expression of apostasy from monotheism (e.g. 2 Macc. 6: 9), they established a severe and unprecedented prohibition against such behaviour. This prohibition manifests itself initially in narratives about heroic figures, much as the stark contrast between monotheism and idolatry finds its expression in new stories about Abraham. The rabbis later expressed this norm through an elaborate set of laws whose stated purpose is to ensure that Jews avoid any sort of engagement with food offered to idols (see further below).

The prohibition against food offered to idols is foundational not only within the Jewish tradition but also within Christianity and Islam. Indeed, the New Testament and Quran alike employ this prohibition as a primary marker of the difference between those who belong to their communities of believers and the broader polytheistic societies from which these communities distinguish themselves. As Paul taught his disciples, 'You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons' (1 Cor. 10: 21; cf. Acts 15: 28). Abstention from food offered to idols continued to be a hallmark of Christian practice throughout the period in which Christians lived under pagan rule (Cheung 1999: 165–295), but the practical significance of this taboo receded with the Christianization of the Roman Empire.

The Quran forbids consumption of all meat over which a name other than God's was invoked (Q. 2: 173, 5: 3, 6: 145, 16: 115; cf. the inverse formulation of 6: 121, which forbids meat over which God's name was not invoked). Subsequent works of Islamic law, however, devote little attention to food offered to idols as a practical concern. Rather, these sources address the applicability of this quranic prohibition to the food of Jews and Christians, in the process reflecting distinctly Sunni or Shi'i conceptions of the relationship between Islam on the one hand and Judaism and Christianity on the other. As we will see, Christian and Jewish authorities also applied prohibitions against food offered to idols to adherents of fellow Abrahamic religions.

Islamic Authorities on the Food of Jews and Christians

On the authority of Quran 5: 5, 'The food of those who were given the Book is permitted to you,' Sunni authorities permit eating meat prepared by Jewish and Christian butchers but forbid meat prepared by other non-Muslims. Sunnis employ this distinction, along with a parallel distinction regarding the marriageability of non-Muslim women, to highlight the affinity between Muslims and People of the Book. The relatively elevated status among non-Muslims that Sunni authorities ascribe to Jews and Christians is the closest pre-modern approximation to the contemporary notion of Abrahamic religions, albeit one that coexists with and reinforces Islamic claims to theological and social superiority over all non-Muslims. According to Sunnis, Islam's affinity with Judaism and Christianity rests not on Abrahamic descent or even on adherence to the monotheism associated with Abraham but rather on the fact that Jews and Christians 'were given the Book', i.e. the Torah or the Gospels. Muslims regard these works as authentic scriptures that point toward the ultimate revelation of the Quran, so respect for People of the Book on account of these scriptures serves to bolster Sunni truth claims.

Sunnis hold that Jews and Christians merit special treatment because of their reverence for an authentic divine revelation, regardless of the fact that they reject God's final revelation and espouse flawed theologies. In particular, Sunni authorities believe that Christians do not conform to Islamic standards of monotheism. This concern underlies debates over whether Christian invocations of Christ run afoul of the quranic prohibition against meat over which a name other than God's was invoked. Nevertheless, Sunni authorities uniformly endorse the general permissibility of Christian meat and, more broadly, all Jewish or Christian foods that do not directly contradict quranic norms. As we noted above with respect to portrayals of Jewish food practices, Sunni authorities apply distinctly Islamic norms when assessing the food of Jews and Christians rather than granting authority to Jewish or Christian norms in their own right: these non-Muslims are not only People of the Book, they are also 'living letters' of Islamic scriptures (Freidenreich 2010a).

Shi'i authorities also address 'hermeneutical' Jews and Christians but take a very different stance regarding the food of these foreigners and, more fundamentally, the status of Judaism and Christianity. Beginning in the tenth century, works of Shi'i law pronounce an absolute ban on meat prepared by Jewish and Christian butchers, whether because these non-Muslims invoke a being other than God (e.g. Christ), fail to invoke God, or are incapable of invoking God properly on account of their erroneous beliefs. Concurrently, Shi'i authorities develop the notion that Jews and Christians are impure and transmit impurity to moist foodstuffs. Shi'is therefore forbid consumption of most foods associated with Jews and Christians. This prohibition reflects the Shi'i notion that, contrary to Sunni claims, there is no significant affinity between Muslims and recipients of prior revelations because the latter reject the truth about God and the divine will, found only within the teachings of Shi'i Islam

(Freidenreich 2011b). In this worldview, which reinforces the exclusivist claims of Shi'i theology, Judaism and Christianity are no better than Zoroastrianism or idolatry.

In order to accommodate their restrictive policies regarding Jewish and Christian food, Shi'is offer an exceedingly narrow interpretation of the verse 'The food of those who were given the Book is permitted to you' (Q. 5: 5). Early Shi'is, like their Sunni counterparts, understood this verse as referring to the meat of Jewish and Christian butchers, an interpretation supported by the verse's literary context. Later Shi'i authorities, however, asserted that the verse refers exclusively to dry, unprocessed produce such as grains and greens, foods that are not susceptible to contracting impurity. 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā (d. 1044 CE) formulated what became the classic justification for Shi'i norms governing Jewish and Christian food. Jews and Christians, he declared, are equivalent to polytheists on account of their flawed theologies and are therefore incapable of performing a valid invocation of God when slaughtering an animal. The Quran, moreover, declares that 'the polytheists are impure' (Q. 9: 28), attesting to the literal state intrinsic to those who reject Islamic beliefs. Just as the quranic permission of Jewish and Christian food surely does not encompass the pork of Christians, it similarly excludes impure foods and meat over which no proper invocation was made (Freidenreich 2011b: 75–8). Notice the way in which al-Murtaḍā, like Augustine on the subject of the blood taboo, employs scripture itself to justify a radical departure from that scripture's evident meaning. Notice as well al-Murtaḍā's binary division of humanity into Muslims and polytheists, one that leaves no room for ascribing significance to Jews and Christians as adherents of authentic divine revelations or as descendants of Abraham.

Christian Authorities on the Food of Jews and Muslims

Islamic authorities regard Jewish and Christian reverence for authentic scriptures positively and, through the medium of laws about food, debate whether this reverence suffices to place People of the Book in the same broadly defined camp as Muslims themselves. Christian discourse about the food of Jews, in contrast, reflects a much more negative assessment of Jewish adherence to the Old Testament. As we have seen, Christian authorities regarded observance of biblical dietary law as a sign of the Jews' rejection of Christ and, more generally, their failure to understand the true meaning of scripture. These authorities also feared that Jews, because they base their practices on the Bible, are better able than others to lead unwitting Christians astray. For these reasons, canonical laws and papal edicts from the fourth to the nineteenth centuries forbade Christians to share meals with Jews. Some ecclesiastical authorities, apparently responding to rhetoric that associates Jews and demons, also applied to Jewish food the prohibition against food offered to idols. Tellingly, these authorities permitted Christians to consume non-idolatrous food associated with other non-Christians, in part because pagans and Christians alike eat all kinds of food without making the distinctions mandated by biblical dietary law (Freidenreich 2008: 47–58).

Pre-modern Christian teachings portray Jews as the antithesis of good Christians and therefore enjoin Christians to behave in a manner opposite that of the Jews. Thus, the consumption of foods prohibited in the Hebrew Bible, especially pork, came to constitute a powerful expression of Christian identity. Consider, for example, the following verse from an eighteenth-century Burgundian song:

> While the Jewish law
> Prohibits lard as heretical
> The same is not so in Christian lands.
> Let us eat fresh pork, Let us eat!
> The more we enjoy the piglet
> The better Catholics we become. (Fabre-Vassas 1997: 247)

The shared scriptural heritage of Judaism and Christianity constitutes within traditional Christian literature grounds for avoidance and hostility, not warm sentiments of affinity.

Even though medieval Latin Christian scholars respected the claims of Muslims to be descendants of Abraham, they did not regard Islam as Abrahamic but rather, in many cases, as idolatrous. Indeed, discussions regarding the food of Muslims within medieval Latin canon law uniformly presume that Muslims are pagans and often warn missionaries not to consume the food that Muslims sacrifice to their idols. Although Latin canon lawyers initially deemed other Muslim foods fit for consumption, by analogy to the food of pagans, consensus ultimately swung toward a general prohibition against sharing meals with Muslims. This shift occurred during the late twelfth century in response to the fact that Muslims, like Jews, draw distinctions between permitted and forbidden foods (Freidenreich 2008: 58–70). Discovery of this commonality, which canonists ascribed to the pernicious influence of the Jews, contributed to the ultimate equation within Latin canon law of the legal status of Jews and Muslims (Freidenreich 2011c). Eastern Christian authorities, in contrast, were fully aware that Islam is not idolatrous; several regarded Muslims and their food as superior to other non-Christians, particularly Jews. Even in the West, where Christians associated Muslims with Jews in various ways, Judaism generally retained its status as the primary antithesis of Christianity.

Neither Abrahamic pedigree nor reverence for the Hebrew Bible constitutes grounds for positive portrayals of Judaism or Islam within pre-modern Christian thought. Quite the contrary, Christians highlighted the differences between themselves and others who claimed Abrahamic descent, with food playing an important role in this process. Jewish authorities also dismissed the significance of common ancestry and scriptural heritage, albeit in a different way than their Christian counterparts.

Jewish Authorities on the Food of Christians and Muslims

Unlike their Christian and Islamic counterparts, rabbinic authorities continued to discuss the practical implications of food offered in idolatrous sacrifices long after

the decline of Graeco-Roman paganism. This discourse reflects both the rabbinic penchant for the systematic application of legal norms and the wilful interpretation of Gentile practices in light of rabbinic categories rather than those employed by non-Jews themselves. Thus, the founders of rabbinic Judaism (first–third centuries CE) taught that Jews may neither consume nor benefit in other manners from any wine made or even touched by a Gentile, out of concern that the Gentile employed that wine in an idolatrous libation. By extension, Jews also may not consume foods that Gentiles might have prepared using wine or wine vinegar and must take precautions when making, storing, and transporting their own wine to prevent Gentiles from accessing it. These prohibitions, inspired in part by the prominent place of wine libations within Graeco-Roman culture, received their fullest expression in Talmudic literature produced within Christian and Zoroastrian societies in which libational activity was not in fact a part of daily life. Nevertheless, Talmudic rabbis and most of their medieval successors persisted in regarding non-Jews, Christians and Muslims included, as an undifferentiated mass of idolatrous Gentiles whose actual beliefs and practices merit no attention.

Limited exceptions to this generalization can be found within rabbinic literature produced in the Islamic world. Authorities from ninth- to eleventh-century Babylonia (Iraq) relaxed the prohibition against deriving benefit from Jewish wine touched by Muslims on the grounds that Muslims do not offer wine libations as part of their purportedly idolatrous worship. Moses Maimonides (d. 1204) went further, justifying this relaxation of Talmudic laws on the grounds that Muslims are not idolaters at all (*Mishneh Torah, Hil. Ma'akhalot Asurot* 10.7–8; see Freidenreich 2012b: 151–6). In another context, namely the commandment of circumcision, Maimonides even ascribes normative significance to the fact that Muslims are descendants of Abraham (*Hil. Melakhim* 10.7–8; see Kasher 1995). This, however, is the farthest any pre-modern rabbinic authority goes in embracing Abrahamic descent as a meaningful criterion for classifying religious communities, and Maimonides himself affirms the classical rabbinic assertion that descendants of Ishmael do not qualify as being of 'Abraham's seed' (*Hil. Nedarim* 9.21–2). Maimonides, moreover, pointedly defines Christians as idolaters irrespective of their reverence for the Bible. Maimonides also emphasizes the constraints of the elevated status he ascribes to Islam: even though Jews may benefit from wine touched by Muslims, they still may not drink such wine. His respect for Islamic monotheism notwithstanding, Maimonides did not espouse an Abrahamic paradigm for conceptualizing the relationship between Jews, Christians, and Muslims.

Rabbis active in the Islamic world ascribed a limited degree of normative significance to Islamic beliefs and practices when determining the legal status of wine associated with Muslims. The same cannot be said regarding rabbis active in medieval Christian Europe. These authorities, who draw no distinctions among different types of Gentiles, sidestep the question of whether Christianity is idolatrous by redefining the purpose of the prohibition against Gentile wine. Rather than protecting Jews from inadvertent association with idolatry, this prohibition comes to be understood as preventing the kind of social intimacy that might result in mixed marriages (Soloveitchik 2003:

137–40). This rationale also appears within the Babylonian Talmud as a justification for prohibitions against bread baked by Gentiles (Freidenreich 2012a) and certain types of shared meals with Gentiles. Medieval authorities explained traditional prohibitions against foods cooked by Gentiles in light of concern about mixed marriages as well. In addition to restrictions designed to limit social interaction, rabbinic law also contains regulations forbidding Gentile foods that are likely to contain non-kosher ingredients. All of these rules apply equally regardless of whether the Gentile in question is Christian, Muslim, pagan, or otherwise. Indeed, rabbinic discourse about the food of Gentiles reinforces a binary worldview that draws no distinctions among non-Jews, irrespective of their beliefs, scriptural commitments, or descent. This worldview bolsters the traditional conception of the Jewish people as uniquely significant.

We saw in the first half of this chapter that the conception of a common scripture at the foundation of all three Abrahamic traditions is overly simplistic and therefore misleading. None of the pre-modern sources surveyed in the second half of the chapter express the sense of kinship among Jews, Christians, and Muslims implied by the term *Abrahamic* either. Indeed, with the exception of Sunnis, these authorities do not even place Judaism, Christianity, and Islam within a single category. These religions may all anathematize idolatry, but that does not prevent their members from asserting that adherents of other Abrahamic traditions are themselves idolaters or functional equivalents. The Sunni conception of People of the Book, moreover, differs fundamentally from the contemporary notion of Abrahamic religions because it is situated within a hierarchical framework and serves to bolster Sunni claims to supersession and superiority.

In short, this survey of Jewish, Christian, and Islamic dietary law has found no recognition within pre-modern sources of the biblical or familial affinities implied by the contemporary term *Abrahamic*. This does not mean, however, that the term itself is necessarily inappropriate when employed by historians of religion. Pre-modern Jews, Christians, and Muslims, after all, did not employ a common method of classifying humanity that scholars might draw upon instead of using contemporary paradigms. The Sunni conception of People of the Book, for example, found no traction even among Jewish and Christian jurists who internalized other aspects of Islamic theology and law (Freidenreich 2012b: 156–60). This and other pre-modern conceptions, moreover, further confessional goals at odds with those associated with the academic study of religion.

We have seen that much can be learned through the juxtaposition of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The term *Abrahamic* offers a convenient label for this juxtaposition even though the substantive meaning associated with this term does not resonate with pre-modern sources. Indeed, because the concept of Abrahamic religions does not derive from these sources, use of this concept offers the opportunity to reflect critically on the conceptions that underlie both traditional and contemporary approaches to describing the relationship between self and other. The term *Abrahamic* is useful precisely because it does not conform to pre-modern sources, so long as the scholars who employ it do not presume that these sources acknowledge the scriptural or familial affinities implied by this term.

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CHAPTER 26

LIFE-CYCLE RITES OF PASSAGE

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A systematic concern with the life cycle of individuals, as an organizing theme in itself, was not part of the Abrahamic religions during their formative stages.[1] The emergence of this focus is a recent development in research. This is not to say that the events surrounding birth, marriage, and death were unimportant or went unnoticed. They were omnipresent and also served as vehicles for central religious ideas and symbols. But the sequential life course of individuals was not a prominent axis along which major religious categorization and discourse took shape.

Brief examples may be given from each religion. The commandments in the Hebrew Bible, addressed to both the collective and to individuals, came to be called *miẓvot* (sg. *miẓvah*). This term was also applied to some rituals ordained later in rabbinical culture. Within the life progression of Jews, male circumcision is the only ritual that appears as a commandment in the Pentateuch. Marriage is often mentioned in the Hebrew Bible (*Tanakh*), but a set of prescribed marriage rites does not appear, even though norm-setting rabbinic literature later used the Tanakh as a source of proof texts. The bar mitzvah, the Jewish coming-of-age ceremony, first emerged only in the late Middle Ages in Europe. Circumcision, bar mitzvah, and marriage, discussed in terms of rabbinic law (*halakhah*), each appear under a different *halakhic* subcategory established in the fourteenth-century code called *Arbaʿah Ṭurim* (Four Columns), which still forms a basic framework for discussing rabbinic law and elaborating it.

Christianity crystallized its central ritual mode in the sacraments. The notion implies an external visible gesture—by a person ordained to do so—that is a sign of divine grace imparted to individuals. Some sacraments are characteristic of different life stages, and Catholicism came to formulate Seven Sacraments. The concept is also central to other forms of ancient Christianity, even with their doctrinal and ritual

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